



Meditators Guide to Great Completion

A Manual of Mingyur Rinpoche's
Teachings on the Practice
of Thorough Cut

By Tony Duff

*MEDITATOR'S GUIDE TO
GREAT COMPLETION*

A MANUAL OF MINGYUR RINPOCHE'S
TEACHINGS ON THE ENTIRE PATH
OF THOROUGH CUT PRACTICE
OF GREAT COMPLETION

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

This is a book of the teachings of Mingyur Rinpoche. In 1998, Mingyur Rinpoche and I travelled from Asia to the United States where we went to various centres, with Rinpoche teaching and me translating. The first teaching was in California, where, for ten days, Rinpoche gave a complete presentation of the Buddhist path for people practising the Thorough Cut path of Great Completion¹. The teaching was unusually complete. I promised him at that time that I would make a book of the teachings. It has taken some time, because of my various other commitments but here it is at last.

As with most oral teachings, the ones included here needed considerable rearrangement and in places amplification or rewriting to make them suitable for a book and clear in standard English. Nonetheless, the content of the book is a complete manual to the practice of Dzogchen from beginning to end.

¹ Tib. Dzog pa chen po. This book will use the English translation of Dzogchen, Great Completion.

The teachings here contain a lot more of the general tenets of the Buddhist path. If you would like a book that reads as a manual of the view, meditation, and conduct of Mahamudra or Great Completion, please read the books *Ground, Path, and Fruition* and *Hinting at Dzogchen* by Lotsawa Tony Duff², both containing teaching on these subjects by Mingyur Rinpoche's brother, Tsoknyi Rinpoche.

² These books are published by and available through Padma Karpo Translation Committee.

MINGYUR RINPOCHE'S

INTRODUCTION

This book includes everything that has to be understood by a practitioner of the Great Completion to do his or her practice. It contains the key points of both sutra and tantra carefully combined to show the path of Great Completion.

The book was put together by the skilled and very learned translator, Tony Duff. Tony used his knowledge and practical experience to put this together in a way that really does convey both my teaching style and the deeper meanings of profound subjects. Because of that, students of mine can study this material conveniently.

Tony has ensured that my teachings on Secret Mantra, and on Great Completion in particular, come through very clearly, therefore, there is a concern over secrecy that has to be clearly stated.

It is fine for you to discuss with others the parts of this book that are common to all Buddhists. That means the first

half of the book, up through arousing the mind of bodhicitta³, and the basic instructions on analysing phenomena to find emptiness. However, I need to caution you in regard to emptiness: emptiness is quite profound and you do have to be careful what you say about it and to whom. It is very easy to go astray in terms of presenting it and it is very easy to present it to someone who will actually be harmed by it even if the person seems to be interested.

Anything concerning Secret Mantra Vehicle—essentially the second half of the book—is secret, just as the name says. Even saying the words connected with the practices of Great Completion and Mahamudra is the same as trying to evince the meaning! Even mentioning the words is the same as trying to explain the meaning. Everything about Great Completion discussed in here is secret.

There is a samaya, a sacred commitment that goes with the teachings of Secret Mantra. One commitment is that you must not show the teachings to people who have not heard about it. If you do, then you break your samaya, and that is serious. You will not only degenerate in this life, but in future lives your rebirth places will tend to go down, and in the end it is possible to go to the hells because of it. The point here is that both for your sake and for the sake of the others who

³ Skt. bodhicitta means “enlightenment mind”; both the mind striving for enlightenment and the mind of enlightenment, too, and this translation will be used henceforth. An explanation of its meaning and clarification of how it is aroused can be found in Padma Karpo’s commentary to *Entering the Bodhisatva’s Conduct* called, “A Lamp for the Path of the Middle Way, A Bitwise Commentary on *Entering the Conduct*”, the first chapter of which is available as a free offering on the Padma Karpo Translation Committee web-site.

could be damaged by hearing these secret teachings before it is time, you should not speak of or show these things except as mentioned above.

Therefore, it is not all right for you to give this book to others or discuss the secret mantra content of the book with them. The reason for this is that this book contains explicit presentations of the details of secret mantra practice. There is an exception, which is that you can show the book to or discuss the teachings with disciples of mine who have already heard these teachings from me or disciples of Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche or Tsoknyi Rinpoche who have already heard all of the teachings contained in here.

PART I

OVERVIEW OF THE WHOLE JOURNEY

OVERVIEW OF THE WHOLE JOURNEY

I. Complete Explanation of Dharma

The principal point in Buddhist dharma is to do something with the mind. By doing something with your mind through the practice of meditation, the unpleasant experiences of dissatisfactory, worldly existence are eliminated and the satisfactoriness of emancipation is obtained. In this book, I will explain the Buddhist dharma from start to finish, with the finish being the ultimate teachings of Dzogpa Chenpo or, in English, The Great Completion. A complete explanation of dharma starts with the preliminaries and then goes on to the main part. Both are important and both are covered extensively in here.

The way that I will guide you through the whole teaching has two aspects. Firstly, there is an analytical side in which rational mind is used to come to certainty about what mind is using logic and secondly there is a meditational side in which mind comes to certainty about what mind is using direct recognition.

If you are going to practise the dharma using these instructions, you will need to persevere at it. It is true in general that, if you do not persevere at something you want to accomplish, you will not get anywhere with it; if you are just lazy, putting things off till tomorrow or putting them aside till later, nothing gets done. Perseverance does not mean that you push yourself and make yourself tight; it means that, with an understanding of what you are doing and your goal, you make a discipline to accomplish your goals. The informed effort that you put in should be steady but relaxed along the way.

2. The Four Truths of the Noble Ones

The Four Truths of the Noble Ones⁴ hold the whole explanation of the dharma. What are these four truths and how are they to be approached? They are: what is to be understood, the Truth of Unsatisfactoriness; what is to be abandoned, the Truth of the Source; what is to be attained, the Truth of Cessation; and what you must apply yourself to, the Truth of the Path.

a. The Truth of Unsatisfactoriness

The truth of unsatisfactoriness is something to be understood. Why does it need to be understood? If you do not understand that your experience is unsatisfactory, then, gener-

⁴ This is often translated as “Four Noble Truths” but it is well-known from the explanations of the Buddha and from the great Indian pandits in works such as the *Abhidharmakosha* that it is “Four Truths for Noble Beings”. It is the Four Truths seen by spiritually advanced beings, the ones who see emptiness directly. Those beings were called “aryas” by The Buddha, meaning “superior” or “noble” in comparison to ordinary beings who have not advanced spiritually to the point where they see emptiness directly.

ally speaking, you will not be able to practise and accomplish the dharma. In other words, to accomplish the dharma, it is necessary first to understand unsatisfactoriness. It is through disenchantment with the unsatisfactoriness of going around and around in samsara that you will be able to practise and accomplish dharma.

What is the unsatisfactoriness in the truth of unsatisfactoriness? The Buddha summed up the entirety of unsatisfactoriness in three great unsatisfactorinesses which he called, “unsatisfactoriness of unsatisfactoriness”, “unsatisfactoriness of change”, and “pervasive unsatisfactoriness of the formatives⁵”.

“Unsatisfactoriness of unsatisfactoriness” means that you have unsatisfactoriness and that further unsatisfactoriness has come along on top of it, for example like being separated from your loved one then meeting your enemy. “Unsatisfactoriness of change” refers to the fact that, in cyclic existence, everything is always changing from one thing to another and hence there is nothing that mind can rely on as a true refuge. For example, in the morning one can be wealthy and in the evening one can be a beggar; in the morning one can be well known and in the evening forgotten; right now everything can be perfect and tomorrow, totally unexpectedly, everything can be a disaster.

⁵ Skt. samskara, Tib. ’du byed. The formatives is a name for the afflictions, also known as the emotions, as a whole. They get their name because they are the things that cause the formation of future sets of psychophysical aggregates. In other words, by having an emotion now, you experience the suffering now of the emotion and at the same time, you create the cause of a future, unsatisfactory existence. This self-perpetuating process of suffering just goes on and on.

This lack of anything that can be taken as reliable in cyclic existence because of constant change is the unsatisfactoriness of change. “Pervasive unsatisfactoriness of the formatives” refers to the fact that your psychophysical makeup includes the formatives, and they are the root causes of further unsatisfactoriness that you will experience in the future. This third unsatisfactoriness is the fact that your existence is pervaded by unsatisfactoriness because, as you experience the first two levels of unsatisfactoriness, the cause of experiencing further suffering is inherently operative in your being.

It is necessary to start the Buddhist journey by understanding unsatisfactoriness. One advantage to understanding it is that it no longer affects you so strongly because even an understanding of it can afford some mental protection against it. Normally, you are strongly affected by unsatisfactoriness because you have a lot of attachment to things not being unsatisfactory, to being smooth and easy. For example, without an understanding of unsatisfactoriness, the normal way of having a very close friend is with great attachment so, later, because things are not fixed, when your friend turns on you like an enemy, you really suffer. However, when you understand the general unsatisfactoriness of your existence, you have a very close friend but without much attachment so, if your friend does turn on you later, it does not create much suffering for you.

Meditation gives you the means to go beyond the entirety of both the temporary sufferings of unpleasant experience and the great unsatisfactoriness associated with this body accumulated through ignorance that has the formatives, and to attain a state of true ease which is completely free from all of that unsatisfactoriness. That state beyond unsatisfactoriness is called buddhahood. A buddha does not have a human

psychophysical structure at all and because of that is not afflicted by the great human sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, and death. In these times we speak of a physical world made up of about one hundred elements and how we can be harmed by them. In ancient India just four elements were spoken of—earth, water, fire, and wind—and it was very much a part of the way of talking in those times that, if one were harmed, one would ultimately be harmed by one of the four elements. Buddha is somebody who cannot be harmed by the elements, whether you speak of them in today's way or in the ancient way. In the ancient way of talking, a Buddha cannot be harmed by the four elements. He cannot be buried by earth; carried away by water; burned by fire; or blown away by wind. This is no different from saying that a buddha cannot be harmed in any way by anything belonging to any part of our existence.

If you practise the path of meditation, you too, can attain that kind of existence beyond unsatisfactoriness. If you examine body and speech carefully, you will not be able to find that possibility of complete freedom in either of them. However, if you look carefully into your mind, you will find the possibility there. For example, modern-day scientists, by examining the physical level—the level of body and speech, have come up with powerful possibilities such as being able to see things from afar through television and being able to know somebody's voice at long distances through the telephone but their studies have never come up with something which allows for the complete elimination of problems. A careful study of mind however, reveals the possibility of attaining all of the inconceivable qualities of a buddha, including the elimination of birth, old age, sickness, and death. The reason for that is that mind is the root of all the different items making up the phenomena within our existence. We do not normally see it that way, nevertheless, all of the different things that we experience—

sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and physical contacts—are in fact, coming from mind just like branches and leaves coming out from the root of a tree.

b. The Truth of the Source

Once the truth of unsatisfactoriness has been understood, what has to be done with it? Its cause, that is, its source, has to be stopped. The truth of the source of unsatisfactoriness reveals the causes of unsatisfactoriness. There are two of them. They are karma and klesha, which in English is action and affliction. What are the afflictions, otherwise known as the poisons? There are many but the five principal ones are: desire, anger, delusion, pride, and jealousy. The root of all these poisons is ignorance. What is action? Action here specifically means an action, whether mental, verbal, or physical, done because of affliction that has arisen in mind. That kind of afflicted action imprints the mind and sets up a seed for something that will occur in the future. Precisely defined, karma is a dependent relationship set in place because of mental action.

When the two causes—action and affliction—are turned away, the result—unsatisfactoriness—is also turned away. How are the two causes, action and affliction turned away? All action comes on the basis of affliction and all affliction comes on the basis of ignorance. Thus, by turning away their root, ignorance, both are turned away in their entirety. When there is no action and no affliction for a person, the impure five psychophysical heaps are not assembled and the impure appearances of the external world of rocks in trees are not created. When ignorance and, concomitantly, the impure five psychophysical heaps and impure appearances of an external world, cease, that person goes to the awakened state of buddhahood. Does that mean that buddhahood is a state in which

everything is stopped, in which there is nothing whatsoever? Is it a state in which there is knowing of nothing whatsoever—nothing to see, nothing to smell, nothing to taste, and nothing to be? Not at all! The impure heaps and impure appearances having ceased, pure being and its pure appearances are present. When that purity comes forth, the awakened one has not the slightest unsatisfactoriness but obtains the great happiness and holiness of having complete freedom, complete knowledge, and complete ability.

c. The Truth of Cessation

When the causes of unsatisfactoriness are stopped, the truth of cessation occurs. There are degrees of the truth of cessation. Each practitioner has their own level of cessation depending on their own level of practice. Thus, the levels of cessation go from a beginning practitioner's level of cessation all the way up to the ultimate level of a buddha's cessation. In other words, the ultimate level of the truth of cessation is buddha, that is, it is the wisdoms and kayas—meaning the form aspects—which make up buddha. That level of cessation is completely free from all unsatisfactoriness, all outflows, and all misery. It is complete separation from all unsatisfactoriness. It is the complete elimination of all unsatisfactoriness.

d. The Truth of the Path

The truth of the path is the dharma that a person must use in order to gain the various degrees of the truth of cessation. The truth of the path has the ability to discard the truth of unsatisfactoriness and the ability to obtain the truth of cessation. In other words, the truth of the path itself effects the accomplishment of the truth of cessation.

3. The Truth of the Path

All of the teachings that show the methods needed to make the journey out of unsatisfactory existence and to a definitely satisfactory state of being are contained in the truth of the path. The teachings are called “a vehicle” because they have the ability to pick you up and take you on the journey from beginning to end. The Buddha’s teaching is a vehicle to enlightenment. However, there are different levels of teachings within it; some can take you to a lesser level of cessation and some to a higher level, some to complete buddhahood. Therefore, The Buddha’s teaching is categorized into different vehicles, according to the different levels and where they can take you.

a. The Two Vehicles

A common way to present the whole set of teachings is to categorize them into two vehicles. The two vehicles are two sequential levels of the overall journey to complete buddhahood. The two vehicles are called the Lesser Vehicle and Greater Vehicle⁶, respectively. The Lesser Vehicle has all of the teachings needed to take you to a personal emancipation from cyclic existence, to the level called an arhat. It does not have the teachings needed to take you to the emancipation of a complete buddha, in which you not only totally emancipate yourself but also have all the means needed to emancipate any and every sentient being. The Greater Vehicle carries on from the Lesser Vehicle and does have all the means to fulfill those two aims.

⁶ In Sanskrit, Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna.

b. The Three Vehicles

The Lesser Vehicle contains only exoteric teachings of The Buddha. The Greater Vehicle on the other hand contains both exoteric and esoteric teachings. Therefore, the Greater Vehicle can also be divided into two vehicles, one for the exoteric teachings and the other for the esoteric teachings. When that kind of division is made, the complete teachings of the path to buddhahood consist of three vehicles. These are called the Lesser Vehicle, Greater Vehicle, and Vajra Vehicle⁷ respectively.

The exoteric teachings of The Buddha are called sutra and the esoteric ones are called tantra. Therefore, within the three vehicle system, the Greater Vehicle actually means the sutra vehicle of the Greater Vehicle and the Vajra Vehicle actually means the tantra vehicle of the Greater Vehicle.

The sutra vehicle of the Greater Vehicle is also called a “cause vehicle” and also called “the Characteristics Vehicle”. It is called a cause vehicle because a person who journeys to enlightenment using it does so by creating the future causes for enlightenment. It is called a “characteristics vehicle” because it proceeds by thorough investigations into the characteristics of phenomena. This sutra vehicle journey to enlightenment takes an exceptionally long time.

The tantra vehicle of the Greater Vehicle is also called a “fruition vehicle” and, as already mentioned, “the Vajra Vehicle”. It is called the fruition vehicle because it practises the fruit, meaning the result of the path, as the path. It is called the Vajra Vehicle because it proceeds by relying on the innermost essence of mind, which has an indestructible or vajra

⁷ In Sanskrit, Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna.

quality to it. This journey to enlightenment is very rapid, comparatively speaking, and can be accomplished even in one lifetime using the very profound methods of either Mahamudra or Maha Ati—the Great Seal or Great Completion respectively.

The presentation of the entire path to enlightenment in the three newer schools of Tibetan buddhism is summed up in the three vehicles just described: the Lesser Vehicle, Great Vehicle meaning the sutra Great Vehicle, and the Vajra Vehicle meaning the tantra Great Vehicle⁸.

c. The Nine Vehicles

The presentation of the entire path to enlightenment in the earlier school of Tibetan buddhism, called the Nyingma or Early Ones, uses a further division of the three vehicles into nine vehicles. In this presentation, the Lesser Vehicle has two vehicles: the Shravaka Vehicle and the Pratyeka Vehicle. These correspond to the two main paths to personal emancipation contained in the Lesser Vehicle. Then there is the Greater Vehicle, which is the same as the Great Vehicle of the three vehicles. Then there are six tantric vehicles, which are divisions of the Vajra Vehicle. These six are divided into three outer tantras and three inner tantras. The outer tantras are not mentioned in this book. The three inner tantras are the vehicles of Mahayoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga. Atiyoga is another name for Maha Ati. The practice of Maha Ati is the real focus of this book.

⁸ In Sanskrit, Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna.

d. Cause and Fruition Vehicles

The causal vehicle gets its name because it is a vehicle that proceeds by making causes for an effect, result, or as is said in Indian Buddhism, a fruit, that will be experienced some time in the future. How do you make the journey to enlightenment in the cause-type vehicle? You start with the development of enlightenment mind which is the motive for the journey. With that as the basis, the journey itself is to make a complete accumulation of the two types of accumulation—merit and non-referential wisdom. The accumulations are completed through the practice of the six paramitas. The journey ends when the accumulations are complete at the stage of a truly complete buddha⁹.

The fruition vehicle, on the other hand, takes the approach that the final result of the journey could be practised in the present. This is the ultimate or highest possible approach. The fact is that the very essence of one's own mind is final buddhahood. It is possible for someone who has direct personal experience of the essence of mind to introduce someone else to their own essence of mind. If you are fortunate enough to have that done for you and, on top of that, actually do recognize it because of the introduction, it is possible for you to take the essence of your own mind as the path to enlightenment. In the Great Completion vehicle, this recognition of

⁹ Skt. samyaksambuddha, Tib. yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas. The name "truly complete buddha" was coined by the buddha himself to distinguish a person who has completed the journey of the greater vehicle and has arrived at the most complete type of buddha possible from that of a person who has completed the journey of the lesser vehicle and so arrived at the lesser and incomplete level of buddha called an arhat.

the essence of your own mind which you use as the path to enlightenment is given a special name—it is called rigpa. If you practise this rigpa, which is present as the essence of your own mind to the point where it is fully manifest, then that is the attainment of buddhahood. This path can be traversed in a very short period of time, relative to the time needed for the cause vehicle, because you are taking the result itself, which is buddhahood, as the path.

Some people can go directly and suddenly to the highest teachings of all, those of Great Completion, and practise through to enlightenment using only the fruition vehicle. However, most people do not have that level of capability and must proceed in a graded way. For them, the most complete journey is to go through both the cause and fruition journeys. They would start off with the cause Greater Vehicle and embrace the view, meditation, and conduct of that vehicle. Their study and practice of the cause Greater Vehicle would include all the relevant parts of the Lesser Vehicle, such as a knowledge of the Four Truths of the Noble Ones, renunciation, and so on. Then they would move on to the fruition Greater Vehicle, the Vajra Vehicle, where they would embrace the view, meditation and conduct of that vehicle. Those who wanted to practise Great Completion would use the ninth and highest of the nine vehicles as their fruition vehicle to enlightenment. In that way, the gradual types would go through increasingly profound levels of meditation, until they reached the end of all the paths and became a buddha.

That is a concise explanation of the overall journey to enlightenment through the three and nine vehicles. In fact, there are an extraordinary number of divisions of the paths and so forth within those vehicles. A full discussion of them fills libraries in Tibetan monasteries.

e. Secret Mantra Vehicle

There are many names for the tantra vehicle of the Greater Vehicle. It is called a fruition vehicle and the Vajra Vehicle for the reasons given above. It is also called the “Secret Mantra Vehicle”: mantra here is another word for tantra and it is secret because it is not a conventional, publicly available teaching but an esoteric teaching which is private and which is kept secret.

Secret here means that it is something that you take and practise for yourself and that it is not a subject for general discussion. Making it into a subject of general discussion means that you would discuss to make yourself famous or well known. In that case, you would be using the esoteric techniques of the teaching to make yourself a big person in the local community, in one way or another, for example to set yourself up as a guru in order to get fame, gain, and so on. The point here is that the contents of the vehicle—the words, meanings, rituals, and so on—are private; they are yours and are not meant for public dissemination. The meditation is something you do privately and is not something that you display in public.

A significant portion of this teaching will belong to the secret mantra vehicle. Thus I would like to say to you quite clearly that the knowledge and practice of secret mantra material gained here is private. It is private, for you, and is not for discussion with others whatsoever. It is certainly not something for you to use with others in order to improve your personal status.

On the other hand, all the teachings belonging to the sutra vehicles are not private and can be explained to others whenever that would be beneficial. For example, it would be fine to discuss or present the teachings of the Four Noble Truths

which belong to the Lesser Vehicle and likewise for the teachings of the bodhisatva's path which belong to the sutra Greater Vehicle.

f. Ripening and Liberating

It is a key point of the Vajra Vehicle that a disciple cannot receive the actual instructions for the practice until he has been entered into the Vajra Vehicle and cannot engage in the practice until he has received the corresponding instructions. To enter a disciple into the Vajra Vehicle the disciple's mind must be ripened with empowerment¹⁰. Once the disciple's mind has been ripened in this way, the disciple must be given the instructions, which are themselves the means by which the disciple will actually be liberated. This is called "ripening and liberating" and it is an essential point of the Vajra Vehicle.

Therefore, before you can continue from these general discussions of the path into the Vajra Vehicle teachings of Great Completion, you first will need to have taken empowerment. In general, "empowerment" is the means by which you become empowered to do something. Here, it refers to the method that empowers you to enter the vajra teachings and to practise them. An empowerment is, in nearly every case, the empowerment that enters you into a deity's mandala. There are many deities and each one has its own empowerment ritual. However, the deity called Glorious Vajrasatva¹¹

¹⁰ Skt. abhiṣheka, Tib. dbangs bskur. A complete explanation of empowerment can be found in *Empowerment and Atiyoga* by Lotsāwa Tony Duff, a Padma Karpo Translation Committee publication.

¹¹ This is the correct spelling according to the Tibetan tradition. It has been so since at least the eight century, when Padmasambhava oversaw the great works of translation that happened at Samye.

subsumes all of the other deities of the Vajra Vehicle, therefore, the empowerment of Glorious Vajrasatva is a very suitable empowerment to provide for people in general when an entrance into the Vajra Vehicle is needed. After you have received an empowerment and have thus been ripened, a teacher can give you the liberating instructions of the Vajra Vehicle.

g. Development and Completion Stages

Once you have been entered into the Vajra Vehicle with empowerment and have received the liberating instructions, you commence the practice. The entire practice of the Vajra Vehicle is summed up into what are called “the two stages”. The two stages are stages: development stage first and completion stage second. Development stage is, roughly stated, the phase of practice in which you visualize yourself as a deity. Completion stage has two subdivisions: with and without signs. Completion stage with signs is the phase of practice concerned principally with the practices of winds, channels and drops¹²; in it, you purify the winds, straighten the channels, and train the drops. Completion stage without signs is the practice of the essence of mind with no elaborations added at all; it is the final level of practice.

As mentioned earlier, the nine vehicles of the Nyingmapa system contain six levels of Vajra Vehicle. Within that there are three outer and three inner levels. The highest levels of practice are contained in the three inner levels which are also the highest three vehicles. These are, from lowest to highest, Mahayoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga. Essentially speaking, Mahayoga corresponds to development stage, Anuyoga to

¹² Sanskrit, *prāṇa*, *nāḍī*, and *bindu*. Tib. *rtsa lung thig le*. This refers to yogic practices in which the subtle physical body is adjusted and tuned in order to bring forth the wisdom of a buddha.

completion stage with signs, and Atiyoga to completion stage without signs.

Atiyoga is another name for Maha Ati, the Great Completion. Therefore, the main subject of this book, the practice of Great Completion, is at the level of completion stage without signs.

h. Great Completion Vehicle: Gradual and Sudden Approaches

The Great Completion teaching does have preliminaries as well as a main part. The main part of Great Completion starts with an introduction to the essence of mind which is given by the guru to the disciple. That introduction is designed to produce a recognition¹³ of the essence of mind in the disciple.

There are two, distinct approaches to how the introduction occurs and the rest of the path unfolds from that. One is that the disciple accomplishes the meditation on the basis of the view and the other is the other way round, that the disciple accomplishes the view on the basis of meditation. In the first, the disciple is introduced to the view and by recognizing it for what it is, is able to accomplish the meditation on the basis of the view that they have recognized through the introduction. In the second, the disciple goes through a series of meditations that leads them to the view. In Great Completion,

¹³ Tib. ngo shes. Recognition is a special term in Great Completion which means recognition of the essence of mind. It is not the same as “introduction”, commonly called “pointing out” but is a step following that. It is the desired result of the introduction. In introduction, the disciple is introduced to the nature of the mind. When the disciple recognizes it for the first time, the introduction is complete. After that, the disciple’s job is to recognize it again and again.

there is a special word for the view as it actually happens in the disciple's experience. It is "rigpa".

The first approach is for disciples with what are called sharp faculties and the second for those with what are called dull faculties. Here, "faculties" does not mean intellectual capability but means a person's ability to realize the highest reality when it is shown directly to them. Many Westerners have sharp faculties according to their teachers at school. Few have sharp faculties according to the meaning intended here.

In the Great Completion teachings, disciples are put into one of three categories according to their ability to directly cognize the view when they are introduced to it. The most capable ones are said to have sharp faculties. The method that is best for them is accomplishment of meditation on the basis of the view because they are capable of directly cognizing the view when it is introduced to them. They are also known as sudden-types because they can practise the sudden path. The least capable ones are said to have dull faculties. The method that is best for them is accomplishment of the view on the basis of meditation because they are not capable of directly cognizing the view when it is introduced to them but must practise the path, step by step, developing the ability to directly cognize the view as they go. They are also known as gradual-types because they have to practise the path gradually, step by step. People who are intermediate in capability are said to have middling faculties.

In the practice of accomplishing the view through meditation, there are many meditations on emptiness which help the disciple to reduce the amount of self-grasping in mind. Using these meditations, the disciple looks very carefully into the phenomena that constitute appearances and finds that they are nothing but a product of a particular way of apprehending

things, a particular way of perceiving things, grasping at things. By reducing the grasping through meditation, it is much easier for the disciple to recognize the view when it is introduced using the higher approach of accomplishing the meditation on the basis of the view. Even in the practice of accomplishing the meditation on the basis of the view, there is still a set of special preliminaries belonging to Great Completion in which the disciple analyses mind to reduce the amount of self-grasping in mind. If the disciple goes through both of these processes very thoroughly, then, when he is finally introduced to the view, his understanding of it can be very profound. Even if not, this approach at least makes it possible for him to be introduced to and recognize the view, rigpa, at some level.

It is necessary for you, the disciple to go through both of these processes of analysis and examination just described because, if that is not done and you are just introduced to rigpa, then you can end up being a stupid, thick meditator. A stupid, thick meditator means a meditator whose meditation is a stupid, thick approach to emptiness. If you do not go through the whole process laid out above, you might be introduced to rigpa but your practice of it, basically because of not understanding what emptiness really is, will be like that of a stupid person. It will come down to the fact that you think you have it, but in fact you don't! And because you don't have it, your whole practice just becomes rather stupid. In short, these outer and inner preliminaries get you close enough to emptiness that you could correctly recognize rigpa when you are introduced to it and not be mistaken about it.

There is a great deal in common between Mahamudra and Great Completion and much of what applies in one also applies in the other. Amongst Mahamudra teachers in Tibet, Sakya Pandita felt very strongly that everyone had to go through the

sutra-style examination of appearances in order to come to a good understanding of emptiness before it could be possible to do Mahamudra meditation. He was very critical of the Kagyu practitioners of the time who mostly did not do those analytical meditations but just relied directly on the introduction to the essence of mind from the guru and practised that. Sakya Pandita said that all of them were making a mistake and would reap the results of it. He is infamous for his statement,

“Stupid people’s meditating on Mahamudra,
Mostly turns into the cause of an animal...”

in which he was saying that Kagyu practitioners of Mahamudra are so stupid in their practice that they just create the cause of falling into the animal realms. A lot of people disagreed with him and disagreed with him very strongly because there are disciples who really do recognize the view correctly when it is introduced to them and then their practice is not stupid and they do not create the causes for rebirth as animals. However, there are many disciples—the gradual types—for whom that is not true and for them, just as Sakya Pandita observed, it is crucial at first to do the examination of phenomena that leads to a precise understanding of emptiness. That is why, as a preliminary, it is very important to go through the process of logical examination of phenomena and come to this kind of proper understanding that I described above before you embark on the main path. If you do not and you are not the kind of person who has the sharpest faculties, then you will not really recognize rigpa when you are introduced to it and then all of your meditation following that really will be stupid, and you really will create an animal rebirth for yourself, just as Sakya Pandita said.

The gradual path is to come to the view on the basis of the meditation. In that approach, you start very slowly and

gently with shamatha practice. Shamatha literally means calm abiding, calming the mind. You go through a lot of shamatha practice and that automatically brings you to what is called vipashyana practice. Vipashyana literally means insight. Then you do a lot of vipashyana practice, itself. Finally, you put the two together and, having put the two together, you come to the view. In this way, by meditating a lot, you do arrive at the view, but in a gradual kind of way. This second style of practice is a very slow approach to the view but it is the one which is suitable for people who have rather dull faculties.

It is true that, whichever of the two approaches that you take, if you put in many, many, many years of continuous practice, then slowly, through either one, you will eventually come to an extremely deep appreciation of reality. Unfortunately, the situation these days is that there are lots of students flocking around the teachers and being with them and having a nice time but not getting the necessary instructions and transmissions to actually do the practice. Because of that, they just hang out around the teacher, and even though they are there for years, nothing happens. This is opposite to what I was just talking about where, with everything put in the right place, and through many years of hard, hard practice, a disciple could actually attain realization.

Accordingly, the rest of this book will go through the instructions of the gradual approach first and end with the instructions of the sudden approach. By doing so, I will attempt to give you the whole set of instructions that you need in order to follow this kind of path.

For those of you who have been introduced to and recognized rigpa already, it needs to be said that there is no fault in going back and starting with the preliminaries afresh; it is said,

“To the extent you accomplish the preliminaries well,
Your practice of rigpa will go well.”

Thus I am encouraging anyone who has already been introduced to and recognized rigpa, to pay attention to the preliminaries because, if that is done well, it will definitely further your experience of rigpa practice. In fact, for those people who have been introduced to and recognized rigpa, as you go through the preliminaries, they themselves will become like the main part for you. And likewise, in reverse, the very fact that you have recognized rigpa does help the preliminary practices.

Warning: The introduction to the essence of mind, the recognition following it, and the practice following that cannot be done by reading about it. Therefore, the explanations of these things contained here can only be a support for those who have already had the introduction by a qualified guru. If you have not had the introduction, then you should not read past the ordinary preliminaries section of this book; reading any further could cause serious damage to your spiritual health!

PART II

THE GENERAL VAJRA JOURNEY

MOTIVATION

Before going on with the actual teaching, the first thing that has to be attended to is motivation. The motivation for doing anything has a very profound effect on the outcome and hence is important. The Buddha said,

“All dharmas are composite.
Stay at the very tip of intention.”

This means that all of our future experience ultimately depends on our intention now. For example, it is entirely because of your past intentions that you at this very moment are someone who has either attained buddhahood or is continuing to wander around in saṃsāra. Because that is so, you should always be right with it in terms of knowing your intention and should always have the very best intention possible.

There are people who do not have good intentions in general but who do have a very good situation in life. They might have a lot of wealth. They might have good things around them. Nonetheless, because of their lack of good intentions, things will slowly turn sour for them. Friends will turn to enemies and, in general, their whole situation will slowly turn against them even though their external circum-

stances were good to begin with. On the other hand, there are people who have very fine intentions and who to start with might not be particularly well known, or rich, or anything like that, but who in the end, will become very well liked, will probably become famous, may end up with a lot of wealth, and so forth, just because they have good intentions. It does work that way.

How is it for us? Well, we have been busy wandering around in cyclic existence for a long time and the reason for that is that our basic intention has always been one of doing things for our own purpose. A person who, on the other hand, involves himself with intentions for the purpose of others, has the ability to step out of wandering in cyclic existence and to attain buddhahood because of it. Therefore, please start now by developing a pure intention for studying these dharma teachings.

The whole practice of the Greater Vehicle—which is what is being discussed here—starts with the intention of becoming a buddha for the sake of bringing every single sentient being to that same state. Therefore, please arouse the thought that you will study these teachings for the purpose of bringing all sentient beings to the state of unsurpassed buddhahood. Think that you will do so by first hearing the dharma teachings, then practising them, and then attaining buddhahood yourself so that you can lead them to that same state.

A Great Completion style motivation is the same except that it emphasizes that you will attain buddhahood through the key points of Great Completion practice. The sort of motivation that you establish is like this: “It is necessary for all sentient beings to attain the rigpa dharmakaya which is present within them. That which they have within themselves

should be realized by themselves. In order for them to do that, I will listen to these teachings.”

An alternative would be to establish clearly in your mind the good motivation that, “Since all of the sentient beings who are wandering around in samsara have in their own mind streams the perfect state of Samantabhadra, which is their own innate, complete self-knowing wisdom, they can achieve and should be brought to buddhahood. In order to bring them to the stage of buddhahood, I will listen to and practise this dharma.”

An alternative thought would be: “It is necessary for all sentient beings to attain to the precious stage of a truly completely enlightened, unsurpassable buddha. I will, through the Great Completion practice of self knowing rigpa, attain buddhahood myself so that they can be brought to that stage.”

An alternative thought would be: “Sentient beings—those who grasp at an I, who take an I to be there when there is no I, those who grasp at a self when they have no self, those who have not made manifest their self-arising rigpa wisdom—are cycling around in cyclic existence and suffering because of it. In order to help them and draw them out of their suffering and into the state of a buddha, I myself need to become a buddha. Therefore, for that reason, I will study this dharma teaching.”

Now, with a motivation properly established, we can move on to the explanation of the actual instructions.

PRELIMINARIES: OVERVIEW

A person who wants to do Vajra Vehicle practice usually starts with a set of preliminary practices designed to prepare a person for the main practice. These preliminaries are divided into two types: common and uncommon. The common ones are a set of four preliminaries drawn from the teachings of the sutras called the “Four Mind Reversers¹⁴”. They are the essence of the teachings on renunciation. They are called the Four Mind Reversers because they are four contemplations that turn the attitude of your mind around so that it faces the other way. Practising them will reverse your orientation from an interest in cyclic existence to an interest in nirvana. Once

¹⁴ Tib. blo ldog bzhi. These are sometimes called the Four Mind Changers but that translation loses a key meaning contained in the original Tibetan term. It is not that the mind is just changed by them, it is that its direction is made to one hundred and eighty degrees around and to go in the opposite direction.

you have done that, there are the uncommon preliminaries which also are a set of four. They are: taking refuge done with prostrations; the meditation and recitation of Vajrasatva; offering the mandala; and guru yoga. These four practices are done one hundred thousand times each and hence are also called the “Four Sets of One Hundred Thousand”. Each of the four prepares the disciple for entrance into the Vajra Vehicle in a specific way.

The Great Completion also has its own set of preliminaries. Therefore, when Great Completion is explained, the two sets of four preliminaries just mentioned become the common preliminaries for the practice of Great Completion and the set of preliminaries belonging to Great Completion become the uncommon preliminaries for Great Completion. That is how they are explained in this book.

The preliminaries are important. The better you understand the preliminaries, the better you will understand and be able to practise the main part. It is just like building a house; if you set a good foundation, the body of the house will sit on it straight and sturdy.

For those who have already done the preliminaries and so obtained the recognition which is the essential beginning to Great Completion practice, going through the preliminaries again will only serve to improve your connection to the main part of Great Completion practice. For those who have not obtained the recognition which is the main part of Great Completion practice, going through the preliminaries properly will enhance your ability to recognize when the introduction is given to you.

PRELIMINARIES:

THE FOUR MIND REVERSERS

The main subject of the dharma, the thing to be explained, is the four truths. The first one is the truth of unsatisfactoriness. It is something to be understood. To impress a proper understanding of it on your mindstream, you do the practice of the Four Mind Reversers. If you do not apply yourself to them, you will not be really able to understand the truth of unsatisfactoriness and deal with it. If you apply yourself to them, you will develop a mind that is turned away from cyclic existence.

Some understanding of the Four Mind Reversers is necessary for any type of dharma practice, even for very high practices like Great Completion. If you have a human being, and that human being has a body with a heart, and arms and legs, and all the bits and pieces all put together, then the whole thing can function as a human being. Similarly, the Four Mind Reversers are said to be like the arms of Great Completion, so for that reason they do need to be understood by Great Completion practitioners.

Actually, the Four Mind Reversers are more like the feet of Great Completion. The heart of Great Completion would be the recognition of rigpa that comes after the introduction to it. Devotion to the guru, faith, and enlightenment mind would be the head of Great Completion. The deities and their development stage practices would be the arms of Great Completion. Great Completion itself is a very profound thing. It is a key point that is very, very profound. It cannot really be fully brought out and shown unless all of these things are shown beforehand.

What are the Four Mind Reversers? They are: precious human rebirth with freedom and connection; impermanence and death; karma, cause and effect; and the disadvantages of cyclic existence.

1. Precious Human Rebirth

You have a human body. Some people are fortunate enough not only to have a human body but to have as well all of the conditions needed to be able to hear, understand, and practise the dharma. It is hard enough to get a human body but to get one that has all of the circumstances needed to fully embrace the dharma is very rare. This kind of human existence in which you have all the circumstances need to fully embrace the dharma is thus not merely rebirth in a human body but rebirth into a precious type of human body.

It is important to understand at the outset just what can be done with this kind of precious human body. For example, there are six main types of migrators in cyclic existence. In the highest position are the god-realm beings whose external circumstances are for the most part filled with the finest wealth and possessions and whose minds continually experience

pleasure. In a lesser position are humans who go through various sorts of unhappiness and suffering. The Buddha said that of the two, humans are in a much better position to practise dharma because their unsatisfactoriness is so evident that it causes them to think of using dharma to put an end to their problems. The gods on the other hand are not in a good position to practise dharma because their constant happiness allows no opportunity for the thought of turning away from unsatisfactoriness. Understanding this brings joy at what you have obtained.

When you have a feeling of just why a precious human rebirth is so valuable, it is then important to look into and realize how difficult it is to obtain. Understanding this will not only increase your joy but will also give you a strong sense of not wanting to waste the opportunity that comes with it. This feeling is only intensified by the next consideration, which is that your precious human body will not last.

2. Death and Impermanence

The second of the mind reversers is the subject of death and impermanence. The explanation always starts with impermanence in general because then it is easier to see the reality of death. There are two levels of impermanence: coarse and subtle impermanence. To understand them, we will look at time.

a. Subtle Impermanence

Time is involved with the nature of change. We talk about previous times, we talk about present times, and so forth. Things, that is, phenomena, and time are related. You cannot say that a phenomenon and time are the same yet you cannot

say that they are different. The two have a very close connection.

There are three times meaning past, present, and future. What is past? Past means that which is gone, which is finished. What is future? Future means that which has not yet happened, not yet arrived. What is the present? The present is that which is in the continual process of finishing.

If you look at those three, past and future are not really time because past is gone and done with and the future did not yet happen. They are, in Buddhism, what we technically call non-things. There are things, and then there are also non-things and the past and the future fall into the category of being non-things.

There was this morning—there was this morning's time—but that time is finished. Then there will be tonight, and there would be tonight's time with it, but that time did not happen yet. For time then, that leaves the present moment, and the nature of the present moment is that it changes.

If we get even more precise about time, it really has to come down to the present of the here and now. The past has stopped, so it is not really time, and the future has not arrived yet, so it is not really time, so what is time? If we look very closely, it means the here-and-now present.

Even as you are reading, what is the time, where is the time of that? You cannot fix it. It is the here and now and it constantly changes. The classic example is that of a finger-snap, which is meant to be a very short moment of time. Even the time in the time taken to snap your fingers is in the process of coming and going. As soon as you click your fingers, that time is already past. Just as you click your fingers, that click! sound is sort of a present moment, but it is in the process of

finishing as soon as it starts. Thus that time is finished just as you click your fingers.

There are four major philosophical tenet systems that make up our study of Buddhist philosophy in Tibet. The first two are schools of thought that belong to the Lesser Vehicle and the last two are schools of thought that belong to the Greater Vehicle. The first one is called the Vaibhashika and the second the Sautrantika. The Vaibhashika is a school that propounds things, discreet entities, discreet phenomena as ultimate truths; they say that such things really exist. They say that, overall, existence consists of external matter and internal consciousness and that, when they are analysed down to their subtlest components, you come to very minute particles of matter and very minute moments of consciousness that cannot be subdivided further. They say that these minute particles and these minute moments of consciousness exist absolutely. Thus, for their tenet system, they assert partless atoms that make up the external world and partless atoms making up consciousness. Furthermore, they follow the ancient Indian system, in which the smallest moment of time is a sixty-fourth part of a finger-snap.

The other schools with more refined tenets do not agree with any of these tenets. The reason that the people of this school do make these assertions is that they become very concerned and worried when the analysis of phenomena, consciousness, and time starts to show that there is nothing there at all. Instead of continuing on, they stop at this level where they feel secure because there is still something to be found.

In Tibetan Buddhism in general, when talking about subtle impermanence, their idea that the subtlest moment of time is a sixty-fourth of a finger-snap is the system used. From that

perspective, all things—houses, chairs, tables (Tibetans use the example of pillars and pots because those were the things common in their culture) exist from moment to moment to moment.

However, our normal level of experience of the present is not at that level of subtlety. It is rather coarse; our minds gloss over the subtler moments and make a fixed picture of the whole thing. Take a house as an example. It was made with some kind of machinery: a saw, and so on. Because of the way that mind glosses over impermanence, it seems that once it is made, it just exists there and that is it. However, that is not how it is. If you look closely, what you find is that the very original thing that was first made finishes the moment that it has been made. Things that were originally there have ceased and are gone after their first moment of existence. So, for instance, if you had a drinking glass yesterday and have it with you now, and I were to ask, “Is that drinking glass you have now the same as yesterday’s glass?”, you would have to say, “No!”.

When you look into phenomena like this, you will agree that what is here now is not what was here yesterday, yet all of us operate as though what is here now is exactly what was here yesterday. What mode of conceptualization do we have going on in mind that produces this kind of mistaken approach to the world? It is a kind of approach in which you just wrap everything up together into one big ball. You take the fact, for example, that there is a drinking glass which is transparent and made of a substance called glass, which has a certain height, which has a certain smoothness of surface, which has a particular shape to it, and so on. You saw all of those features as a group in the glass today and you saw the same features yesterday, so your mind sort of wraps all of those features up

into one big ball and comes up with a conceptual lump which it calls a drinking glass. All of your perceptions are then tied to that conceptual lump instead of the moment to moment direct perceptions of the thing called a drinking glass.

Another way to see this is with the example of a fan that is switched on and turning rapidly. The centre part probably has a design or writing on it but, because it is rotating rapidly, you do not see all of the individual details but instead see one hazy sort of thing that appears to be just stopped there in space. Your eye looks at it and your mind says, "Centre of the fan" but in fact, that centre of the fan has all sorts of pieces and patterns on it that you are not seeing because they are whizzing by too fast for your eye to distinguish them.

Yet another example that could be used to make this clearer is a waterfall. Take a waterfall that you see from a long distance. When you get up close to it, you see little bits of water flying here, there, and everywhere, and you think of the waterfall as little bits and pieces of rushing water. But when you get a long way away from it, what you see then is one solid thing, and you say, "Ah, waterfall!". This mistaken mental process that we have been talking about is called "confusion" in Buddhist terminology.

The discussion is really about the fact that things do change from moment to moment. It is designed to make you realize that you are making the mistake of seeing everything in a permanent way when in fact everything is impermanent. There are two benefits to this: the first is that you do realize that things are impermanent. The second is that you realize that your mind is making a significant mistake in how it is apprehending its world. This can be used as one part of a series of meditations on the lack of substance in phenomena.

This is discussed further on, as part of the approach to emptiness. You might like to join this discussion with that one.

b. Coarse Impermanence

The very subtle changes of time and the changes to phenomena that go together with it discussed above correspond to subtle impermanence. There is also the coarse level of impermanence. Take a house, for example. A house is something that you have to build to start with. You take all the bits and pieces, and over a period of time, you erect the house, so that it is a functional entity. And having erected it, it stays put, hopefully, for a while. And at some point, somewhere along the line, it is either destroyed, or falls to pieces; due to one cause or another, it collapses to the ground. In Buddhist theory, we say that, even though the house is changing at the subtle level, there is a continuity of the phenomenon “house” at the coarse level that lasts until the house finally comes to an end. This continuity is called “the continuum of coarse impermanence” and means that something is changing from moment to moment but, like a thread, appears to be continuous. In other words, in the duration of time between its initial construction and its final collapse, there is a continuity of moments of existence that add up to a house which is there for the duration.

In general, from the time something is made up until the point where it collapses, dies, finishes, or whatever happens to it, there is the continuum of the coarse impermanence of that thing. All compounded phenomena have this kind of coarse impermanence. That includes our human bodies and all the things outside ourselves. That is true for your life, too!

c. **Death is Definite, Its Time is Indefinite, and the Only Thing That Will Help At the Time of Death is the Practice of Dharma**

Impermanence affects our lives. We are going to die but when we are going to die? This is something that we just do not know. We do not know how for long we will live. However, we do know one thing; the length of life is determined. How? It is determined by the previous accumulation of karma that we have made.

Therefore, in this rather short life that you have, if you were to take dharma and practice it well, it would be of great benefit to you personally. In this world of ours, there is, except for dharma, nothing of value at all. So, if you want to make something of value out of your life, then you need to set about practising, and hopefully actually accomplishing, the dharma. Therefore, we say, “Practise starting today, then practise tomorrow, practise the day after, and continue your practice without any laziness intervening”.

It is true that everything is accomplished on the basis of the parts that make it up. A long period of time comes on the basis of lots of little short periods of time. So, if you set about your dharma practice, in the sense of doing a little bit, and then immediately doing another little bit, then another little bit, then another, you will in the end have one big accomplishment.

You could turn away from the worldly side of things totally. You could re-orient yourself to dharma and involve yourself in that completely so that you could get some kind of real attainment. You are allowed to do that and it would be good to do that. However, it is also possible that you could gain attainment without abandoning what you are already doing with your life. To do that, you would have to put dhar-

ma together with your life fully. That is possible; it is one of the special teachings of the vajra vehicle.

Remember that the point is not that you have to go off and do some special thing externally, for example, you do not have to go into retreat, you do not have to wear a monk's robes, and so on. You could do those outer things but that is not the point. The point is to fully involve whatever you do with dharma. Do your daily things but do them together with dharma and then you will be able to accomplish your dharma just through that. From that perspective, it wouldn't matter how much worldly activity you do. As long as you mix dharma in with it totally, you can do all of your worldly things—all of it, whatever, completely—and that would be fine.

If you do your dharma practice the way that I am suggesting, meaning that you could keep on with your worldly activities but do your dharma practice within that, then it seems to me that you will become even more capable at your worldly activities, and will probably be able to accomplish those even better than before. It would seem, I suppose, having said that, that you would become even more capable at your work in the world. However we cannot really say whether this is true or not true. One thing we do know though, is that if you really practise dharma, then you do abandon hope and fear and because of that you become more of a warrior. And in becoming a warrior, it would seem, I suppose, that you would probably be more capable at whatever you do. But one thing here, just to be clear about this, is that although I am saying to do your worldly things, I am not suggesting that you should get more and more involved in the world and just end up spinning off into all sorts of different activities.

In ancient India there were eighty mahasiddhas. They were people who were supremely accomplished in terms of

the spiritual journey yet who did all sorts of different things in the world: some were beer sellers; some were ordinary merchants; some were musicians; and so on. They had all sorts of ordinary occupations. One of them was Tilopa who was known for the fact that, by consorting with his prostitute, he attained attainment. There are many stories like his.

As far as impermanence goes then, what you need to realize, basically speaking, is that you only have a short time. No-one knows how many years they will have. Some people will have short lives, some people will have middling length lives, and some people will have a longer life but no-one knows which. So what is necessary, one way or another, is to realize that time is short, that the time of death is uncertain and then, because of that, to realize that you should get on with practising dharma.

3. Karma, Cause and Effect

a. What is “Karma, Cause and Effect”?

The word “karma” simply means action though in Buddhism, it specifically refers to action done with affliction. Action done with affliction creates a seed in the mind and that seed will later ripen into a result. Thus karma not only means the original action that sets a process of cause and effect in motion but also implies the whole process of cause and effect that goes with it. The process itself of cause giving rise to an effect was given a long technical name by The Buddha: interdependent origination. The name means that, in dependence on one thing, another thing originates, or comes about. Something arises and it arises not simply as an effect depending on a cause but in a process of inter-relationship between those things. Thus karma is not merely about an action done with affliction but about a whole process of cause and effect that

operates in a process of interdependent origination starting with that action.

b. Two Levels of Karmic Cause and Effect: Obvious and Hidden

There are two levels of karmic cause and effect: obvious and hidden. Obvious means karmic cause and effect that is sufficiently obvious to your senses that you could know about it, look into it, apply reasoning to it, examine it. Hidden means karmic cause and effect that it is so subtle that it is hidden from your normal perceptual capabilities.

c. Obvious Karmic Cause and Effect

This covers everything that is knowable through the senses, for example, the whole universe. Western scientists are very good at understanding this kind of cause and effect. They say, “There is this, and because of this, there is that. This cause brought this effect. These two things here are interdependently related in this kind of way”. You will never hear a scientist assert that a thing comes without a cause. They always assert that things come in a relationship because of a cause.

I think this is something that you understand. For example, in the massive wheat fields out in the middle of the United States, there is cause and effect going on all the time. It is never the case that you get wheat ripening without lots of cause and effect happening. Wheat cannot grow, cannot fruit, unless a large number of causes come together. It does not happen causelessly and it does not happen on the basis of one cause alone.

To grow wheat, firstly, you need the right circumstances for growing it. You need soil, moisture, warmth, and so on. If any of those circumstances is missing, then the effect cannot

come from the cause. You might have the wheat seed but it will not be able to ripen into a head of wheat. It is just not possible. For example, if you do not have soil, it will not happen. You might have everything else, but if there is no soil there, it is not going to be possible to grow the wheat.

When looking into cause and effect, we find that there are two kinds of cause. In Buddhist philosophy, they are called the proximate cause and the principal cause. These correspond to what we normally call condition and cause respectively. In other words, the proximate cause means the conditions that surround a main cause. In the example of growing wheat, wheat itself is the principal cause and the soil, moisture, warmth, and so on, are the proximate causes or conditions.

One principle of cause and effect is that you must have both the proximate causes and the principal cause(s) needed or the result cannot come, for example wheat could not grow. You might have the principal cause—for example the wheat seed—but if one of the proximate causes is missing—for example the soil—then no matter how many other proximate causes you bring along, the process will not start and the principal cause will not turn into its result. In other words, you must have all of the necessary causes and conditions come together for the result to happen.

A second principle of cause and effect is that you always get a result that corresponds to the principal cause. For example, if you start with a wheat seed, then you get wheat as a result; not barley or any other kind of grain. Another way to look at this is that, if you want a particular result, you have to start with the appropriate cause. For example, to get wheat, you specifically have to have wheat seed as the principal cause.

A third principle of cause and effect is that, if all the causes and conditions are assembled, then, unless something is done

to prevent it, the result has to happen. If you do assemble all of the causes and conditions needed for a particular result, then, unless you specifically do something to stop the process, the process will commence and will follow through to the appropriate result. In the case of growing wheat, if the conditions which are the proximate causes—the earth, moisture, warmth, and so on—are brought together and the principal cause—the wheat seed—is put together with them, then, unless something is specifically done to prevent it from happening, a head of wheat will grow as a result.

That is a description of the basic process of cause and effect. Wheat was the example used but this same reasoning is applicable to everything in your experience. Whatever you can see, hear, smell, taste, touch through your five senses operates in exactly that mode.

Karma and its attendant cause and effect ends up being a very big subject. It is so big, in fact, that it encompasses all of the activities that we, as worldly people could do. If you know cause and effect, then you can do anything in the world. For example, in Western society, the people who understand cause and effect are the scientists. Western scientists do not know every detail of cause and effect because they do not understand the hidden level of it, which we Buddhists do know about. Nonetheless, they do know the obvious level of cause and effect, they do know a lot at the level of the physical world, and because of that they are able to do all sorts of things, for example, they are able to make atom bombs.

You see, if you understand cause and effect, then, just by understanding one very small corner of the whole, you know also how the whole thing works and that bring the possibility of making something that has a huge effect. For example, because of scientific research into the principles of atoms and

how they work, scientists have been able to make electrical and electronic devices like telephones, movie projectors, and so on.

d. Hidden Karma

When we talk about the hidden level of karma, we are talking about karmic cause and effect in relation to mind. The way that mind creates and accumulates karmic causes and is involved with the fruition of those causes into results, either mental or physical, is not obvious to the normal senses. It is hidden from the normal level of knowledge.

i. What is Mind?

We have a body and we have a mind. What is mind? Mind is something other than our body. It is defined in Buddhist philosophy as that which is “illuminative and knowing”; it not only knows but has the capacity for self-knowing, which is what the term “illuminative” refers to.

I had a discussion with some French scientists about mind and they said that from their point of view, the mind is that which thinks but that it depends on the physical brain. They said that the brain is a mass of nerves which contains very small sub-cellular particles because of which it is possible for the brain to function as a faculty that knows sights, sounds, smells, and so forth. Thus, for Western scientists, the functions of the mind—thinking and so forth—occur in dependence on the brain and its physical makeup as just described.

Now, when I look at it, the sub-cellular particles that the scientists mention as being the core principle that results in mind are nothing more than a collection of atomic particles. I cannot see mind or anything special about mind in that. So I asked them, “Well, what is the specific feature within those sub-cellular particles that makes them produce mind? The

answer was, “We cannot say.” Because of this, some people then say that there is no mind. They reason that there is the brain and its various physical components and, for the very reason that they have come together in a specific arrangement, a specific type of functionality—the mind—occurs. In other words, they say that mind is none other than the functioning that occurs on the basis of the physical structure of the brain and since it is a mere functioning, then they go on to assert that there is actually no such thing as mind.

There is something in our Buddhist tradition which is very similar to what the Western scientists speak of when they talk about what constitutes the brain–mind. In the secret mantra system, we describe a set of very subtle nerve-like channels, which result in the faculties of being able to see, smell, taste, touch, and so forth. However, unlike the Western scientists just mentioned, we do say that there is a mind which does not depend on those physical things for its existence.

The point here is that there is a difference between how Buddhists and Western scientists proclaim the status of mind in relation to the brain. Western scientists speak of it the way that I have just described, which is that the mind is entirely dependent on the presence of physical brain and its functioning. Western scientists would say that if you take away the brain, there will not be a mind. Buddhists disagree with that. We say that there is something besides the physical brain and—or its functioning. For us, even if you do not have the brain, or even if you have the brain and it is not functioning at all, still there will be a thing called mind.

The Buddhist perspective of mind and body can be exemplified using a motor car. A motor car is a complex device that has been put together with an engine and all of the moving parts necessary to make an engine, and additionally with all

of the other necessary devices, such as a steering wheel, suspension, and so forth, that allow it to operate. A car is like a tool, with a complete collection of the bits and pieces put together to do a particular piece of work. However, without an operator for that machine, nothing happens. The machine needs an operator, a driver, in this case. Likewise for the brain. The brain is like a tool with all of the bits and pieces necessary to do something but unless there is an operator for the brain, and the operator in this case is the mind, then nothing happens.

Well then, how is mind? Mind has a specific feature to it that machines do not have. It knows what it is doing; it knows about itself. For example, we think, “well, I am doing this now, I am doing that, I am doing the other”. We, because we have a mind, have the ability to know what we are up to, so to speak. A machine cannot do that. Take a computer for example. A computer relies entirely on instructions being given to its machinery. Having been fed instructions, it can do something based purely on the instructions that have been given to it. A mind, on the other hand, knows what it is doing, in itself.

In France, I went to a large hospital famed for its heart transplant operations. I spoke to a number of doctors and patients there and found that it is not uncommon for out-of-body experiences to be reported during this kind of surgery. The anaesthetic is applied and the patient about to have the heart transplant loses consciousness. Having lost consciousness, the patient’s consciousness seems to separate from the body and the consciousness, from a distant position, observes all of the details of the operation. During the process of revival, the consciousness joins back together with the body. In this way, we know that mind is not the body but does that it does travel with it.

The Buddha pointed out that the body is like a guest house and the mind like the guest. A guest house is just a place that the guest stays. It does not give particularly advantage to the guest and does not harm the guest, either. Should the guest house fall down, then the guest just goes away. Likewise with the body and mind. The body is something that does not particularly do great favours for the mind inhabiting it nor does it harm the mind, either. It is just a place that the mind stays and when the body finally falls apart, the mind just goes on its way.

Mind does not have a beginning and does not have an end. It is a stream that continues on moment by moment. Body, on the other hand, is something that you toss away—and even the word in Tibetan for body quite literally means “that which is dispensable”. The body can and does end but that does not stop mind. Thus, there are such things as previous and future lives.

In our Buddhist textual tradition, we have an extraordinary number of reasonings that show why mind is something that has been a stream that has continued on from beginningless time and in relation to that why there are previous and future lives. There are such a large number of those reasonings that it takes a lot of time to go through them all. However, if you do that and really apply yourself intensively to it, then, over a period of time, you come to a very fine understanding of the whole thing. You could apply yourself to it for a few months, easily. I myself have applied myself to it for five years.

ii. How Karma is Accumulated

Where is karma accumulated? Karma is accumulated on the mind. When you do any action of body, speech, or mind and the mind connected with it has any of the afflictions, a karmic seed is planted in the mind. That karmic seed is a cause

which has the potential to produce an effect later on. The cause and effect of it operates using the principles described earlier.

What kind of karmas are accumulated? Generally speaking, karma is either positive or negative because the actions done to create them are either virtuous or degrading. In our Buddhist tradition we called positive karma virtuous and negative karma non-virtuous or degrading. Roughly speaking, virtuous karma is that which arises from doing good actions—actions that have less self-interest involved with them—and non-virtuous karma is that which arises from doing degrading actions—ones that are very self-interested.

What effects to these karmas have? Overall, virtuous karmas result in future situations that are pleasant and non-virtuous karmas result in future situations that are not pleasant.

iii. The Ten Virtuous and Non-virtuous Acts

The Buddha explained ten, specific non-virtuous karmas. He explained these ten specifically because, if you avoid creating them, you avoid the major causes of lower rebirths. In other words, he taught his followers to avoid them so that his followers could keep themselves from falling into lower rebirths. He then explained ten virtuous karmas which are the reverse of the ten non-virtuous ones and said that doing them is a positive step away from doing the non-virtues.

The ten non-virtuous karmas that should be avoided are comprised of three actions of body, four of speech, and three of mind. Those of body are: to kill a sentient being; to take something which has not been offered, which includes stealing; and to engage in sexual misconduct. Those of speech are: to speak harshly; to engage in divisive speech; to lie; and to engage in gossip mongering. Those of mind are: to be covetous,

meaning not being satisfied with what you have and to want what somebody else has; to bear harmful thoughts, meaning to have a mind that wishes harm to others; and to have a mind that contains wrong views.

The ten virtuous karmas are the reverse of the ten non-virtues in the particular sense of not doing the ten non-virtues, for example, not to take life is itself the virtuous action which is the opposite of the non-virtue. Not to steal is the virtue which is the opposite of the non-virtue, and so on.

iv. How Karmas Ripen

If karmas, virtuous or non-virtuous, have been accumulated on the mind, they are bound to ripen. They ripen according to the principles discussed earlier. It is just like the ripening of seeds. If you have a seed such as a wheat seed and you apply all of the appropriate circumstances such as moisture, soil, and so forth to it, then it is inevitable that the seed will ripen into a full-grown wheat plant, unless something is specifically done to stop the process.

Karma is inevitable. Once a karmic seed has been accumulated, it is inevitable that it will ripen. At some point—the point when the appropriate circumstances come together, whatever they might be—that seed will ripen and there will be no way to stop it.

Karma is something that you accumulate for yourself and then get back as a result for yourself. You will not experience the results of someone else's karma that they have accumulated. However, you will experience the results of the karmas that you have accumulated.

Once you have accumulated any given karma, there is nothing you can do to change that. It is not alterable. You have accumulated it, it is there, and it is definitely going to

come out in a certain way. Note that this does not mean that there is nothing you can do about it; it means that there is no way that you can change that fact that you have accumulated it. In other words, you cannot modify a karma that has been accumulated so that it will give a different result. That is just not possible. Even a buddha cannot do such a thing. The Buddha himself could not change his own karma and he cannot change your karma, either. Karma is absolutely inevitable; it works exactly the way it is supposed to work. It goes in a straight line. That is how it is.

The result of karma is definite. If you accumulate virtuous karmas, then you will get virtuous results and if you accumulate non-virtuous karmas, then you will get non-virtuous results. If you have accumulated virtuous karmas in the past or accumulate them now, then in the future, you will receive happy circumstances when they ripen. If you have accumulated non-virtuous activities in the past or accumulate them now, then in the future, you will receive unhappy circumstances when they ripen.

The corollary of karma being definite is that, at any given time, if you are happy, then that is a sign that you are experiencing a karma which previously, when it was created, was a virtuous karma. And if your circumstances are really bad, then that is a sign that previously, you accumulated really rotten karmas and those karmas are coming to fruit now. We can go a step further still. It is said that your current body is a cartoon of your previous activities. So in other words, from your present cartoon, you can know what you were doing before. Likewise, you know what your actions are now and since you know that cause and effect are infallible, you can know from what you are doing now how your future body is going to be.

v. How Karma is Ended

One person asked me, “If our karma is set and unchangeable, how could we affect our future?” The answer is that karma is inevitable but not unchangeable. Karma is what it is until it is done with, either because it ripens into its effect or because you do something to clean that karmic seed out of your mind, including even getting rid of the root ignorance that allows the karma to stay with you. Karma is inevitable means that it will give a result according to how you made it, good or bad. However, it is possible using the methods of all three vehicles—Greater, Lesser, and Vajra vehicles—to blunt the karma, to stop it, or even to get out of the karmic loop all together by eliminating the root cause of cyclic existence, which is ignorance.

If a buddha could remove or change in some way the karmic collections that other beings have, then it is quite certain that all of us would suddenly find ourselves in a god realm. If buddhas could do that then, because of their extraordinary compassion, they would immediately step in and change our karmas for the better and we would immediately find our circumstances much better than they are right now. However, no buddha can do that. It is just not possible, so it does not happen. The Buddha made this statement which is recorded in the sūtras,

“I can show you the path but I cannot travel it for you. Having shown you the path, you have to take it and travel it yourselves. I can show you liberation but I cannot give you liberation. You have to take the path and liberate yourselves.”

Ignorance is the beginning of the whole karmic process. If you remove that, then you end the whole karmic process.

The Buddha explained how sentient beings come into existence and how that existence perpetuates further existences. He explained a sequence of twelve, inter-related steps called the twelve links of interdependent origination. When the twelve links go in a forward direction, they start with ignorance and from that root the whole of samsaric existence, which includes karma and its operation is produced. The Buddha also explained that the process could be reversed. If a Buddhist practitioner goes through the twelve links in reverse order, he goes back through the process of cyclic existence till he gets to the very root of it, which is ignorance. If he then destroys that ignorance, the whole process of samsaric becoming is stopped and, with that, all of the karmic seeds that have been accumulated in the mind are destroyed. Thus, the whole point of Buddhist practice is to remove the root of the process of samsaric becoming, ignorance, because doing so destroys the rest of the paraphernalia of cyclic existence. For as long as you have not removed ignorance, you also will not have removed karma and the afflictions and you will continue to wander in saṃsāra, cyclic existence.

All of this points back to the mind as the source of the problem. Precisely because of understanding the way in which the external world of cause and effect works, it is possible to create things such as nuclear weapons, and precisely because of understanding the way that the internal world of cause and effect works, it is possible to do something as powerful as completely destroying your conventional world of delusion, eliminating all unsatisfactory states, and arriving in the enlightened world which is not only completely satisfactory for yourself but is totally capable in terms of benefiting others.

Sometimes people think that, because of these teachings, they can change the course of a particular karma or eliminate

some particular karmic effect, such as an illness. The teachings on karma were not designed to give you a way to selectively fix parts of your life. And, although the course of karma can be changed, it might not be an easy thing to do in some cases. The best approach is to practise, and seriously, not just for the purpose of changing one particular karma but for the purpose of going to enlightenment for yourself and others. If you do that, you will be cutting away the negative karmas from the past, in general, not just a specific one that is bothering you now. If you really work hard at it, then you will, on the one hand, gradually clear away all the negative karmas that you have accumulated in previous lives and, on the other hand, root out the ignorance itself that allows the whole karmic process of cause and effect to keep operating. The Vajra Vehicle, because it gets so effectively and directly at mind, is the most effective way both for cleaning off all of the negative karmas that have been accumulated and for leaping over the whole karmic process all together. Therefore, this course of instruction is primarily aimed at the teaching of Great Completion, which is the ultimate method for eliminating ignorance and the karmic process of cause and effect with it.

4. Disadvantages of Cyclic Existence

The disadvantages of cyclic existence actually means “the punishments of cyclic existence”. No matter where you are in cyclic existence, it is punishing to be there. It is unsatisfactory from top to bottom. That is its nature. There is nothing good about it, anywhere.

The Buddha summed up all the different types of being that live in cyclic existence into six types. Each type of being goes through its own particular difficulties because of the rebirth that it has taken and this topic usually consists of an

extensive explanation of those various difficulties. For example, human beings have to experience the four great sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, and death. Animals have their particular set of sufferings. And so on. Once these have been explained, it is pointed out that, no matter which of these types of birth you take, it is not satisfactory. Contemplating this engenders a strong feeling that continuing on with a samsaric style of existence is not a good idea.

There is a very important point here. You must understand that the punishments of cyclic existence does not merely refer to sufferings. It means much more than that. It means that any of the six types of beings in cyclic existence has an existence which is just unsatisfactory from top to bottom, even if that being seems to be in a state of enjoyment in any given moment. When you understand the depths of what a cyclic existence entails, you understand clearly that there is just nothing satisfactory about any type of existence in cyclic existence, anywhere, any time.

To explain the fullness of the unsatisfactoriness that beings in cyclic existence experience, The Buddha explained three levels of unsatisfactoriness. I have already explained them in the section at the beginning on the Truth of the Source of Suffering; you might want to review that before reading on.

The first of the three levels of unsatisfactoriness is the level of plain suffering. Every being understands this as unsatisfactory because it is sheer suffering. The second level is the level of change. Cyclic existence is in constant flux. This is not understood as unsatisfactory by many beings. However, people who look carefully into the circumstances of life and mind can understand that the change they are inevitably subject to is another form of unsatisfactoriness. The third level is called the pervasive unsatisfactoriness of the formatives. It means

that, at root, cyclic existence is not only unsatisfactory in the moment but is a self-perpetuating situation that keeps on propelling us into further unsatisfactoriness. This level of unsatisfactoriness pervades every being, from top to bottom.

The pervasive level of unsatisfactoriness comes from the fact that sentient beings are deluded. Because of that delusion, afflictions arise in mind. Those afflictions are the formatives, the things that form, quite literally, future existences in cyclic existence, with all of their further troubles. The new existences that they create are marked by further delusion and affliction, with all of the actual suffering caused by them. On top of that, the delusion and afflictions that arise during that new birth life immediately become the formatives of further, deluded existences in cyclic existence. This is a constant burden that is never solved for any sentient being until the being exits fully from delusion, that is, from cyclic existence.

The first level of unsatisfactoriness is understood by all beings. The second is understood only by a few, usually the ones in the human or desire god realms. The third level of unsatisfactoriness is very subtle and hard to understand; it is understood by very few. There is a statement in the sutras which says,

“Unsatisfactoriness is a like having a hair on
your arm...”

Ordinary beings caught in cyclic existence do not experience a hair on the arm as unsatisfactory. However, an spiritually advanced person who has left cyclic existence¹⁵—an arhat, a

¹⁵ Skt. *arya*, Tib. *’phags pa*. Here spiritually advanced translates a word often translated as “noble”. Unfortunately, at the time of writing, the word noble has been widely misunderstood by Western

(continued...)

bodhisatva, or a buddha—and who does understand the nature of things, knows that a hair on the arm is intensely unsatisfactory. Whereas we experience it as nothing in itself, as just another part of our existence, an arya knows it to be as miserable as poking a hair into your eye.

Even though this is difficult to understand, it is what you must come to understand, if you are really to comprehend why cyclic existence is just unsatisfactory from top to bottom.

This kind of talk often results in statements in English such as “Life is nothing but suffering.” and some people find that difficult to comprehend. As a matter of personal experience, they know that human existence, at least, does have moments in it that are not suffering. They then query the validity of this most fundamental teaching of The Buddha, that samsaric existence is nothing but unsatisfactory. The problem here is that The Buddha did not say that life is nothing but suffering. He said, “Life is nothing but unsatisfactory.” There is a subtlety here and that subtlety must be understood.

For example, some people find eating ice-cream to be very enjoyable and hence cannot understand how that could be suffering. The point is that your whole psycho-physical makeup, your whole existence in cyclic existence—which includes the fact that you enjoy ice-cream—is unsatisfactory. Aryas, the spiritually superior beings who have exited cyclic existence,

¹⁵(...continued)

Buddhists who tend to think of it as meaning a “good” practitioner. It is much more than that. It is a word specifically coined by the Buddha to indicate those who were advanced to the point, spiritually speaking, that they had left cyclic existence. Because of that, they are noble compared to the ones who have not and who are just the “ordinary ones” as Buddha himself said.

do not partake of our confused experience. Beings like that would chomp down on ice cream but, unlike us, it would not make any difference to them. They do not need ice-cream in any way at all. It is not just that they do not care about it, it is that they are not dependant on material things like we are. They do not have an existence in which the whole perceptual process, including enjoyment, is just part of an unsatisfactory existence. Ordinary humans are dependent in some way on Haagen Das ice cream but a Noble One does not give a hang about it. It does not make any difference to him. His body does not need that kind of stuff to stay alive and his mind does not need the experience. He is not dependent in any way at all on things the way we are. He or she looks down on our experience and says, “Darn, that is really unsatisfactory. That is just not where it is at!”

All of your existence came about based on a cause. The cause itself was unsatisfactory, so the result partakes of that; the result of that cause also necessarily partakes of unsatisfactoriness.

Consider the wheat fields which spread out over much of the United States. If you live in the United States, you get your food from there. You eat bread, pizza, and so on coming from the wheat, don't you? How is wheat grown? First, the soil has to be tilled. That is done with a tractor that crushes the earth underneath it together with all the worms and other little creatures—and there are a lot of them if you get a magnifying glass, let alone a microscope, and look—that live there. Not only that, as you open up the soil underneath, more damage is done. All the worms underneath get exposed to the sun and the ultraviolet light in the sunlight kills them. Then in turning over the earth, what was on top is now turned under and all of the little creatures that were on top get turned under

and killed or maimed. The next step is to use a machine to put the seed into the ground. That causes more death and damage to living beings. Then the seed is watered with giant sprinklers and more sentient beings die because of drowning. When the wheat has ripened, the farmer runs a harvester through the field and mice, snakes, and other sentient beings are killed. Then the heads of the wheat are run through a mill; insects that like to live in the wheat, such as weevils and so forth, are crushed to death.

Then the flour from the wheat is carried off, packaged, and sent to stores. The classic model of selling is that the seller gets as much profit out of the customer as possible. One way or another, even in the United States, there is a certain amount of lying and deception going on in the process of selling to you the user, the consumer.

You, the consumer, make your pizza, bread, and toast and eat it. When you eat it, you eat all the accumulated negativity of all of those sentient beings being killed. Your simply eating that wheat means that you are part of a whole inter-related process of unsatisfactoriness, with large measures of actual suffering included. In that way, just on the basis of wheat, your whole human existence is connected with unsatisfactoriness and actual suffering. If you examine other parts of your existence in the same way, you might be surprised to find the extent to which you not only live in an inter-related ball of suffering but are inextricably a part of it because of the way that existence in samsara works. It is nothing but unsatisfactory.

PRELIMINARIES: THE FOUR SETS OF ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND

Once you have developed a sense of renunciation through contemplating the Four Mind Reversers, the next step is to do the preliminaries for the Vajra Vehicle in general. There are four of them and they are usually done one hundred thousand times apiece, hence the name.

The explanation given here for the four sets of one hundred thousand is not a set of instructions for the practice; it is an introduction to the meaning and in some places is given more in terms of Great Completion, the main subject of the book. Note that there is also a summation of the four sets of one hundred thousand that shows how they fit into the overall path of Great Completion in a later chapter called “Assurance of Rigpa”.

1. Refuge

Taking refuge is the very root of all Buddhist practices. Therefore, every Buddhist practice starts with taking refuge. Refuge is the main practice of the first of the four sets of one hundred but when done in that context, it is specifically done together with physical prostrations. The explanation here is of refuge alone and the style of the explanation, especially of The Buddha Jewel, follows the style of Great Completion.

Now what do we take refuge in? We seek refuge in that which is above us, which is the Three Jewels: Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha.

a. Refuge in Buddha

The Buddha Jewel is the ultimate of the refuges. You might say, “Is there just one Buddha Jewel or are there many Buddha Jewels?” The answer is that there is more than one. How is that? There are the dharmakāya, sambhogakaya, and nirmāṇakāya aspects of a buddha, and they are all regarded as Jewels of refuge.

What does “buddha” mean? The Sanskrit word means just the same as the English “enlightened one”, exactly. The Tibetans did not have a single word “enlightened” so they translated the Sanskrit into Tibetan by using two words which add up to the meaning of enlightenment. The first word they used means “cleared up” in the sense that all obscurations have been cleared off and the second means “expanded” in the sense

that the person has expanded the set of enlightened qualities to fullness¹⁶.

Where does buddha come from? Buddha comes from us coming to final certainty about our own minds.

i. The Qualities of A Buddha

What qualities does a buddha have? The totality of a buddha's qualities can be summed up in many ways, one is into three: all knowing, love, and capability.

(1) All-knowing

The all-knowing quality of a buddha means knowing, and knowing which has no—literally speaking—centre or fringe to it, which has no dimensionality to it, at all. You cannot put limits on it. How does that kind of wisdom function? A buddha knows right in any given moment everything that is happening in that given moment. If a buddha were here, he would know right now everything that is happening in this world—everything—but that is still a very limited example of what it really means. The full extent of it is that a buddha knows what is happening for all sentient beings. Wherever there is space, there is a sentient being. And a buddha knows what they are thinking, what their constitution is, what their desires, thoughts, and ways are. He knows everything about all of them, all at once.

What is space? Space is that which is non-obstructive. It is that which allows other things to be somewhere to occupy their own situation. It does not get in the way. It does not

¹⁶ The first word of the Tibetan translation can also be explained to mean “woken up” and because of that, sometimes it has been translated into English as “Awakened One”. However, the Sanskrit does not mean “awakened”, it means “enlightened”.

stop things, does it? If there were not space, then things could not arise. For example, a glass sitting on a table would be sitting there because there is space for it, because there is space allowing it to come into existence.

No matter how far you travel, space is not something that you can contact. It is an un-contactable item. And likewise, if you go up, no matter how far you go up, you cannot touch it. No matter how far you go down, you cannot meet it. It would not matter in which direction you went, you still would not be able to meet space.

Space is dimension-less. When we say space, we mean something that could not have a centre, a middle, and an edge. Because there is no edge to it, it is also un-referenceable. Because there is no edge, there could not be a middle that you could reference in relation to the edge. In other words, it is dimension-less. If you put a centre somewhere then automatically there is something over there, an edge that you can refer to. Everything we do is in reference to a here and a there and the way that you say that officially in Tibetan philosophy is that you have a centre and a fringe. What it comes down to is that if you have one, you automatically have to have the other. If you do not have one, then you do not have the other, which in English is “dimension-less”.

The lack of dimensionality of space is actually one of the best examples that you can give for Great Completion. When you get down to this kind of point of Great Completion, then of course, what comes is this understanding of no edge, no centre, no dimensionality.

To continue, space is something that pervades all sentient beings. It covers every sentient being. For this reason, we then say that sentient beings have no centre or edge but meaning that sentient beings cannot be dimensioned. Then you under-

stand that a buddha's all knowing quality completely contacts all of that.

As sentient beings our minds also cover all of space but we do not understand that. We have grasping and by that grasping we have become very small, we have contracted away from the fullness of the ultimate fullness of a buddha. In other words, because of karma and affliction, we have become obscured and because of that we can no longer talk about what actually is.

For us, the very essence of mind has become obscured. For a buddha, all of that obscuration has been completely cleared off. In this way, you can understand how it is that a buddha's mind, having all of the obscurations removed, does cover space, and since sentient beings also cover space, that a buddha knows exactly what is going on with all sentient beings at any given moment. That is the particular quality of a buddha's all-knowing wisdom.

(2) Love

The Buddha has an extraordinary love for all of us sentient beings. We, being only concerned about ourselves, have all of our concern for this little thing here and because of that, we do not have concern that covers all sentient beings. A buddha does not have that kind of contraction. A buddha's wisdom sees the circumstances of all sentient beings so his love covers all of them. That is the particular quality of a buddha's love.

(3) Capability

The capabilities of a buddha's body, speech, and mind are just inconceivable. A buddha's body could, if he wanted it to, completely cover the whole of space. It can manifest countless bodies throughout space. One aspect of a buddha's capabilities

is that he has magical powers. A buddha can take our whole universe and put it into a small seed and that would be without our universe changing in size; it would just fit in there. And a buddha could withdraw it and return it to its original size again.

Does that fit in your mind? It doesn't does it? It just does not go into your mind. I can say to you that he takes the universe and stuffs it into the space of a small seed, and you understand that. And then I can say that he pulls it out and it returns it to its original size, and you understand that. But it just doesn't work for your mind, does it? No. Nonetheless, if you really look into the actuality¹⁷ of the situation, that can happen. Why can it happen? It is because of emptiness. This whole thing of big and small is actually just an appearance that occurs through our confused minds. In fact, large and small, sizes all together, are equal in emptiness. We also have the idea of I and other, this and that, good and bad. All of those dualistic things are, in emptiness, completely equal.

If you do not understand the equality that is emptiness, then you have fallen into a position where you do not understand the truth and you are confused. In fact, we are quite capable of manifesting The Buddha's level of magical power. We could do those magical things of taking something apparently large and making it apparently small and taking something apparently small and making it apparently large. We

¹⁷ Tib. *gnas lugs*. The actuality of anything is the way it really is. The actuality of mind is found in its innermost nature. This term is often translated as "natural state" which is far removed from what it actually means. The term simply means how something actually sits, how it actually is as opposed to other mistaken possibilities.

are capable of playing with large, small, and pairs of opposites in that way at will. It is possible.

It is not so much that buddha is performing those miraculous feats. Rather, he is just partaking of reality, being reality. Thus, if we rely on buddha who is that kind of reality, then it will happen at some point that we will be able to do the same kind of thing. In one way, that sets us up as being equal to a buddha, but remember that buddha is something quite special.

The three things of a buddha's all knowing quality, love, and capability are for you to understand. Through knowing those kinds of things, it is possible to get to the really profound dharma of The Buddha, the dharma which is completely beyond rational mind altogether.

ii. The Three Kayas of a Buddha

There are the three kāyas or bodies of a buddha: the dharmakāya, saṃbhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya.

What is the dharmakāya? Dharmakāya translated literally means the reality body. Dharma has many different meanings but in this case it means reality. It is the body that is just concerned with reality as it is. The dharmakaya has no colour or shape. Why then do we talk about dharmakāya Samantabhadra, the primordial buddha of Great Completion, and portray it in a certain way? This does not make sense, if you think about the qualities of the dharmakāya! It is portrayed in that way to help us understand the qualities of the dharmakāya.

The dharmakāya manifests into form which does have colour and shape and which can be seen by other beings. There are two main ways that it does so and these are called the two kinds of rūpakāyas or form bodies. The saṃbhogakāya is a level of manifestation that can only be seen by buddhas

and very advanced bodhisatva. The saṃbhogakāya generally appears as “the five families of the conqueror”. The nirmāṇakāya is a level of manifestation that appears in the worlds of sentient beings. There are three different kinds of nirmāṇakāya. The first is “the supreme nirmāṇakāya”. This is the form of The Buddhas who appear amongst humans, show the various acts of enlightenment, and establish the teaching of dharma when it has disappeared. This form looks human but is actually far superior to a human. The second is called the nirmāṇakāya being. This is a manifestation that appears as beings other than a world-leading buddha; it appears amongst sentient beings in order to assist them. The third is called the artefact nirmāṇakāya. It is something that is constructed by us humans, for example a buddha statue, that does the work of enlightenment. There are all sorts of different examples, in different times and places, of representations of enlightenment, being formed and put on display by us humans. Those things are artefacts made by beings but all are regarded as nirmāṇakāyas.

iii. Taking Refuge

To take refuge in buddha, if you take refuge in Shakyamuni Buddha himself, that will suffice. Alternatively, it could be in Vajrasatva, in Guru Rinpoche, or in whoever you have faith in as a fully complete buddha.

To do this, you have to start with the feeling that the being really is present before you. Then, with that feeling, you do a refuge supplication of some sort. You do this with the thought that, no matter what happens, you will take refuge in that being.

The interesting thing here is that, whatever supplication you make, whatever effort you make from your side to take refuge in buddha or the other Jewels, the Jewels actually know

what you are supplicating about; they know of your efforts to take refuge. Therefore it is quite fine to feel that the object of refuge really is before you, really is looking down on you, and really is there with you, comprehending everything that is going on.

One of the important features of a buddha is that he is totally capable as an object of refuge. There is never a point where a buddha is not suitable, is not capable as a place of refuge. A buddha never changes in this regard, where others who are not so suitable might one day be able to protect you but the next day not.

By approaching that kind of object in that kind of a way, you open the door to blessings entering into you. If you do not make some effort to connect with the object of refuge that way, whether through an actual supplication or whatever heartfelt feeling you have, then it will not be possible for blessings to enter you. On the other hand, if you do it, the more you do it, the more the blessings will come down.

On a buddha's side, his whole activity is to provide refuge for sentient beings. On your side, if you do not open up to that, then it will not be possible for that preparedness to provide refuge to actually come and connect with you. The Three Jewels can be seen as a hook and your faith as a ring; the hook is already out there so, if you put out the ring of your supplication and faith, then your ring can connect with that hook and be draw on by it. There are a lot of buddha hooks out there offering refuge to you but if your mind is just a big lump that the hooks cannot catch onto, then it will not work, will it? So it depends on you and your faith; if you have faith and you make the effort, then you can make the connection and actually join with the object of refuge.

The Buddhas have magical abilities to help us and they are quite willing to do anything at all to help sentient beings. However, if you stay closed off and do not make the effort to open to the object of refuge, then, although The Buddhas have the qualities of all-knowing wisdom, love for all sentient beings, and extraordinary capabilities, there is no possibility that those qualities could do anything for you at all.

b. Refuge in the Dharma

The second refuge object is the Dharma Jewel. To take refuge in that you take refuge in The Buddha's dharma teaching as the teachings, instruction, and advice that you will follow.

c. Refuge in the Sangha

The third refuge object is the Saṅgha Jewel. In general, the word "saṅgha" means "community", exactly, and of course, in the Buddhist world, it refers to Buddhist community, of course. However, in the Buddhist world, there is more than one type of Buddhist community. One of them is the community of Noble Ones, the beings who, because of having seen emptiness directly and exited from cyclic existence, are spiritually superior to the ordinary members of the community who are not so advanced. When Buddhists take refuge in the sangha, they do not take refuge in the Buddhist community in general. Rather, they take refuge in the Sangha Jewel, which is the community of Noble Ones. The reason for this is that it requires a level of spiritual attainment to be a true refuge.

d. Refuge is the Only Doorway

Taking refuge in the Three Jewels is an exceptionally important point for anyone wanting to follow the Buddhist path. It is the particular, and also the only, entrance to the Buddhist teaching. If you have not taken refuge, then you

cannot enter any of the Buddhist teachings, let alone the highest one, called Great Completion. Because taking refuge is the doorway that allows you to enter the Buddhist teaching and practice of it, it is also the basis of all qualities, since all good qualities arise from practising the Buddhist teaching.

2. Arousing the Mind

Taking refuge is the root of all practices in all Buddhist vehicles. Similarly, arousing the enlightenment mind is the root of all practices of the Greater Vehicle. Therefore, arousing the mind¹⁸, as it is called, is done immediately following the taking of refuge in all Greater Vehicle practices, including the first of the four sets of one hundred thousand.

Bodhichitta or enlightenment mind is the specific motivation that you will do whatever you do in order to become a buddha yourself so that you could lead all sentient beings to that stage.

The whole of your confused world arises on the basis of mind. It arises because of discursive thought going in the wrong direction. A normal person's discursive thoughts do not go in the direction of enlightenment but in the opposite direction, of endarkenment, as somebody said to me. Endarkened thoughts are what make your world for you. What are these endarkened thoughts? They are exactly grasping at a self and everything that comes along after that. Arousing the enlightenment mind counteracts this, because it develops a mind that goes in the direction of enlightenment.

¹⁸ Tib. *sems bskyed*. Arousing of the mind specifically means arousing the enlightenment mind.

Let me make a small example of this. There is somebody here in this world who has a great deal of consideration for just himself alone; a very self-centred kind of person. He continuously practises his self-centredness. If you watch that person over a number of years, you will see him go down. When you see this kind of person, you know somehow that he has an internal motivation which is not so good. Most people are like this. They just think about themselves. They do not really think about other people at all. Very few people have the kingly mind of thinking about others. Very few.

We need to improve and expand good minds within ourselves. The minds of thinking about others, being concerned for others, and having compassion for others should be developed. To do that, you do not concern yourself just with yourself but with all sentient beings, who, we consider, are everywhere around us, pervasive as space.

To develop this kind of mind, you start by considering that all sentient beings really are present before you. Then you consider their unsatisfactory, miserable situation of living in cyclic existence and develop the thought that you would like to see them get beyond that.

Those sentient beings have grasped onto a self which is not really there and because of that have their various body-speech-minds in their particular creations of cyclic existence, with all of the attendant unsatisfactoriness. For example, there are the beings in the hell realms with their particular versions of suffering that continue on without a moment of respite from the pain. Hell beings generally experience sufferings of heat or cold. The ones in the hot hells usually are in some kind of extraordinarily hot and burning situation which does not go on for a short while but continues on for, I would say from their sides, what seems to be an eternity. These beings in the

hells, like all other sentient beings, are grasping at an “I” where there is no “I”. They do this because of not recognizing the essence of their minds, which at root is emptiness. On the basis of that fundamental mistake, they create a whole, fictional, hell world for themselves. Where does the fire of the hot realms come from? What is the fire really? The fire is a confused appearance coming out of emptiness. If the beings in the hell realms were to recognize these, the appearances of their own minds, for what they are, then that would be the immediate end of the hell realm. Shantideva talked about this in his famous text *Entrance to the Bodhisatva’s Way* when he said, “Who made these sufferings in the hell realms? Who did this? Was it the Lord of Death who put people there, and who made the sufferings there? No, it was people not recognizing their own appearances for what they are.”

All the other sentient beings in the various other realms of existence are in exactly the same situation. Because of not understanding reality, they create their worlds and the bodies that live in them, with all of the unsatisfactoriness that goes with it. So too for us as humans: because we have not recognized the essence of our minds and have not understood our own appearances as being our own appearances, we have created a complete and totally fictional, human world for ourselves. All of our situations as sentient beings are created by us through not understanding our own minds.

If you think it through like that, you incidentally see that we, as practitioners, are extraordinarily fortunate people. Not only are we fortunate in a general sense of having entered into the particular path that we have, but we are exceptionally fortunate given that we could actually attain buddhahood through the higher practices of Great Completion in this very lifetime or at least within a small number of subsequent lives.

So how should we relate to these sentient beings in their unfortunate situation? We should have compassion for them. There should really be the strong feeling, “Ah, I really would like to remove them from their sufferings all together and to lead them to the state of buddhahood”. You should develop that kind of thought and, on the basis of having that kind of strong feeling of compassion, think, “Wow, then I will meditate, just because of this reason. My whole purpose for meditating, for doing any kind of dharma practice whatsoever, will be solely to help these sentient beings, to lead them out of their misery to the state of buddhahood”. When you have aroused that kind of mind, you have aroused the enlightenment mind, otherwise known as bodhichitta.

a. The Faults of Self-Cherishing

There are two main ways to arouse the enlightenment mind. The one that I am explaining here, called exchanging oneself for others”, centres around developing a mind that is concerned less with yourself and more with others¹⁹. There is a saying from a famous practitioner of this approach that embodies it exactly:

“All loss and defeat to me.
All victory and goodness to others.”

If you start out by thinking, “I am going to get the profit for myself”, in other words, “All good things to me”, then you actually will not get what you want. To have thoughts that are for the purpose of others is the best kind of thought, it is much higher than thinking only about yourself.

¹⁹ For a more complete description of the two techniques for arousing the enlightenment mind, see the book of *A Complete Session of Meditation* by Tony Duff, available through Padma Karpo Translation Committee.

If your thoughts towards others are thoughts of jealousy, desire that they be reduced in status, desire generally that they not do well, and all the rest of it, then what you actually do is defeat yourself. For example, when you have anger towards others, the very first thing that happens is that you yourself become unhappy, so you have just created suffering for yourself. And there is always some kind of concern of thinking, "Now, when am I going to get this other person?" There is always some kind of hope and fear about what is going to happen in the situation. You worry, "Is it going to escalate as far as actually hitting the other person? Are they going to try to come and get me? Am I going to get them?". In that way, an angry mind just turns into something which is harmful throughout. The same is true for all of the other, afflicted minds that come from cherishing and wanting things for yourself instead of others.

Anger is especially harmful. Being angry is just like having drunk a lot of liquor; when you have drunk a lot of liquor, you cannot think straight, and all sorts of bad things happen. Usually the first thing that happens when you get angry is that you start to say spiteful words; all kinds of unpleasant things come out of your mouth. And then on top of that, there is the possibility of physical violence. Then the other person becomes unhappy. It just creates unhappy, unpleasant minds all around.

For people with a higher level of anger, everyone around them starts to appear as an enemy. Because of it they cannot accomplish their own purposes and they also have no concept of how to help others.

Altogether there is no profit whatsoever in being angry. When you are an angry kind of person, other peoples' minds just become very fearful. Then they do not like you and you

have a situation in which you are isolated and everyone else draws away from you. Eventually, if you are angry enough, the others will just dispense with you and exclude you altogether. If it goes even further, people will kill you, if necessary.

Anger does not create a situation that calms down of itself. One person gets angry, then that person is disliked by another person, and if the anger is not defused, sooner or later there will be some sort of fight. The angry person might even try to solve the problem by killing their enemy but that just makes new enemies now of the enemy's friends, family, and associates. The anger does not just stop with the death of the first enemy. It is an affliction that continually escalates itself until, in the end, the angry person has created an army of hostile enemies. Anyone who continues to enjoy their anger in this life will not be able to accomplish anything in this life and in future lives will have a great deal of suffering.

There is no difference, actually, between working with, and eliminating your own internal anger, and pacifying, taming, overcoming all of your enemies by external means. A person who does not have any anger is somebody who also does not have any enemies. On the other hand, to the extent you have anger, you also have enemies. The two are related. You can tell from how many external enemies you have, just how much internal anger you have.

There is a saying about this. It goes, "You cannot cover the whole world with leather but can cover your feet with it". The meaning is that it is not possible to remove all of your enemies by relating to them in the usual way of trying to deal with them one by one. However, if you tame the enemy in your own mind, anger, you will solve the problem of external enemies.

The same is true for passion, jealousy, pride, and all of the other afflictions. If you really enjoy, or involve yourself with any of the afflictions then, in the end, you will not get what you really want. The only solution is to tame them from your mind. The Lesser Vehicle teachings also say that the afflictions harm you therefore they should be tamed. However, the motivation connected with this it is still connected with the thought of yourself: you are to remove them so that you get out of cyclic existence for yourself. The point in the Greater Vehicle is not merely that the afflictions should be tamed but that the process of mind which is at the root of them, the self-cherishing mind in all of its variety, should be abandoned and its opposite, minds that cherish others, should be put in its place so that all beings can be taken to enlightenment. Having an understanding to start with and later a strong conviction that self-cherishing and the afflictions connected with it should be discarded in favour of minds that cherish others is the first step needed for the development of enlightenment mind in the approach that I am explaining here.

b. The Actual Thought Pattern for Arousing the Mind

Once you have developed a feeling for cherishing others over yourself, it is possible to arouse love and compassion for other sentient beings.

All sentient beings have, at one point or another, been your mother. Remembering their kindness, you should arouse the love of wanting to give them happiness and the causes of happiness, and should arouse the compassion of wanting to remove their sufferings and causes of suffering.

What do “mother sentient beings” and “sentient beings who have been your mother” mean? Cyclic existence is beginningless, therefore, all of us have been wandering, without beginning, in cyclic existence. Many beings in cyclic

existence do have a mother. Therefore, if you think it through, you will realize that there is not one single sentient being who has not been a mother to you in one life or another.

Mothers are always very, very kind and very, very good to their children. They always look at their children in a very kindly way and give the best things to them; for example, they always give their children the best piece of food. Mothers do not care about themselves when considering their children and because of it go through a lot of difficulty. All of those sentient beings who have been your mother are wandering around in cyclic existence. You should have compassion for them. You should take that thought, of kindness and love for them, and turn it into a practical fact. You should do something with it, practise it.

The only effective way to take all of these beings out of their wandering in cyclic existence is for you yourself to become a buddha so that you can take them to the level of buddhahood. To do that, you have to study the dharma and practise it but you have to do so with a motivation that fits with the goal. That motivation is called “the enlightenment mind”.

Here is a complete sequence of thought that can be used to develop the motivation of enlightenment mind prior to doing any kind of dharma activity. “Mothers are kind; sentient beings are our mothers; they are wandering in cyclic existence; I need to do something about it; the only way to get them out of their suffering is to take them to buddhahood; and the only way to do that is for me to become a buddha first. Therefore, I will listen to, or practise, the dharma.” That whole stream of thought is the way to arouse the enlightenment mind. So please arouse that kind of intention, that kind of motivation for yourselves.

3. Vajrasatva Meditation and Recitation

The second of the four sets of one hundred thousand is the practice of meditating on the deity Vajrasatva and reciting the one-hundred letter mantra of Vajrasatva. This is done in order to cleanse the practitioner's being of degrading actions and obscurations so that they can progress on the path.

4. Mandala Offering

The third of the four sets of one hundred thousand is the practice of offering a mandala. This is done so that the practitioner accumulates the two accumulations of merit and wisdom.

5. Guru Yoga

Guru yoga is a Sanskrit term. It means "joining with the guru". It is the very root of all practices of the Vajra Vehicle, including Great Completion because it brings the blessings needed to be able to see reality in direct perception.

In the context of the four sets of one hundred thousand, guru-yoga has the specific function of bringing down the blessings needed so that, when the disciple is entered into the Vajra Vehicle by means of the next step of empowerment, the empowerment will be effective at ripening the disciple's being.

The following explanation is given from the overall perspective of guru yoga as the root of all practices of the Vajra Vehicle, including Great Completion.

a. Importance of the Guru

Why is the guru so important? This particular time that we are in now is known as the degenerate time. At this time, we do not have the fortune to meet directly, face to face, with The Buddha. The Buddha said that people in the future would not have the fortune to meet directly with someone like him, therefore manifestations embodying the entirety of his love, compassion, and capability would appear for the sake of those beings. He said that these manifestations would appear in each of the realms, in accordance with the nature of the beings in that realm. And that is what has happened. For each of the various realms of migrators that there are, manifestations of enlightenment appear in accordance with how the migrators are in those various realms so that the beings there can relate to enlightenment. Thus there are manifestations appearing in our human realm, which accord with us, meaning that we can relate to them.

Thus, the guru has a special meaning for us. The guru is a vehicle through whom The Buddhas' blessings can descend and enter us. Because the guru is there, there is a vehicle through which the blessings can descend, and it is possible for us to gain all of the benefits that come with blessings entering into us.

On our side, there is the opening that The Buddhas, through their knowledge, love, and capability, are continually looking down on sentient beings, continually knowing their situation. As soon as we avail ourselves of that opening, something can happen.

The Buddhas are there with all of their knowledge, love, and capability so the opening, the possibility exists. However, if the guru is not there, then no matter what you are doing,

and no matter what you have, there is no vehicle for blessings and so forth of The Buddhas to be expressed and to enter you.

If you do have a guru, then these two things can come together and in that case, you can supplicate the guru to gain his blessings. However, there is a point here. You must have devotion for the blessings to descend. For example, the sun is shining all of the time and if you take a magnifying glass and focus the beams of the sun onto some paper, you can start a fire, however, if you do not use the magnifying glass, even though the sun is shining, you will not start a fire. Devotion is the same: the guru and the blessings of The Buddhas are always shining, like the sun, however, if you do not use devotion as the way to gain the blessings, then there will be no blaze of blessings descend.

In the vajra vehicle, the guru is supremely important and there are a number of perceptions of the guru that you must specifically develop at this level of practice.

Firstly, you take the attitude that the guru is a buddha. When you meditate, you meditate on the guru as being inseparable from buddha. In that way, the guru is seen as being exactly equivalent to and not separate from buddha in any way at all.

Secondly, you take the attitude that the guru is extremely kind, even kinder than The Buddhas. Why is the guru very kind? Firstly, even if The Buddhas came down and manifested directly for us, we would not have the means to see them directly and no matter what they did, it would not work because of our inadequacies. However, we can meet with the guru who embodies them. Therefore, the guru is actually kinder than The Buddhas.

b. You Must Examine the Person Before Accepting as Guru

It is clearly stated in the texts of the tradition that you should carefully examine the person who you are thinking of as a potential guru before accepting the person. There are false gurus and you do not want to fall in with one because, if you do that, your spiritual journey could be harmed for many lifetimes. Therefore, it is said that there is big danger here. You have to be careful about choosing a guru. You do not do it just on the basis of name. Rather, you have to examine the person carefully and then, when you have looked well, and are certain that there is no problem, you can accept the person as guru.

c. After Accepting the Guru

Once you have made that decision, it is your job to develop the attitudes just mentioned. You must also venerate the guru, treat the guru with respect, and pay attention to whatever the guru teaches you. If you do not do that, the punishment, as is said in the texts of the tradition, is severe.

It is said that, if you turn away from paying respect to the guru, due to developing wrong views, then you cut the root, the life-force altogether, of the vajra vehicle. In the Vajra Vehicle, the principal means by which you keep your sacred commitment, your samaya as it is called, is that of maintaining your devotion to the guru and venerating the guru.

d. Level of Attainment

The level of attainment that you could achieve because of having accepted a guru, then through venerating him and relying on him for dharma instruction, is principally dependent on you, not on the guru's attainment. It is like this. If you see the guru as buddha regardless of his station, then the level

of blessing that can descend and enter your being is the level of a buddha's blessing. If you see your guru as a bodhisatva—someone who is high but who has not quite attained buddhahood—then correspondingly the level of blessing that can occur for you is the level of blessing of a bodhisatva. Similarly, if you see the guru as being a very good person, then the level of blessing that can enter you is that of being a good person yourself. And likewise, if you see the guru as just an ordinary person, then that is as much blessing as you are going to get.

There is a good example of this in the story of Milarepa, the great yogi in Tibet. Milarepa first met his guru Marpa, then went through a lot of trials, received the instructions, went through incredibly hard practice, and at the end accomplished the practice. Later, for many years, he wandered in the mountains. He had his own students and taught them. At one point, there was an interchange, which has since become famous, when some of his students said to him, “You know, it seems to us—and please tell us honestly about it—that you must be the manifestation of a buddha. You travelled the whole path to buddhahood from the beginning to end. It does not seem possible to us that you started off as an ordinary person and traversed the path. You must be a manifestation of a buddha. Is that so?” Milarepa replied, “Well, your sacred outlook is very good. You see me as a buddha. That is really excellent. However, you have made a mistake with respect to the dharma. You said that I must be a manifestation of The Buddha because I could not, in one life, go from an ordinary human being to a buddha. That way of thinking is mistaken because you are saying that the Vajra Vehicle dharma cannot be as effective as it says it can be.” One point is that his students actually saw him as a buddha and he praised them for that; they were practising devotion correctly. The other point is that, by relying on your guru and his profound instructions

of the Vajra Vehicle, you really can attain enlightenment in one life.

e. Formal Practice of Guru Yoga

To do a formal practice of guru yoga, it is usual to visualize a deity and see it as inseparable with your own guru or to visualize your guru just as he is, just as he appears to you in human form. If you do it the latter way, it is said that the amount of blessing that comes is not so great, therefore, it is more usual to visualize your guru with the form of a deity but, as is said, with the entity of your guru. Moreover, you also regard that appearance as being the complete sub-summation, the complete embodiment, of all buddhas and bodhisatvas. Then, when you practise that way, the blessings that can and will come down to you are the complete blessings of your guru and of all The Buddhas and bodhisatvas. There is often a further step in this kind of practice, which is that lights radiate from specific places of the deity and in doing so purify your obscurations of body, speech, and mind and bestow the four empowerments. At the end, the visualization of the guru melts into light and dissolves into you. Your mind and your guru's enlightened mind merge and become inseparable and you meditate directly on the essence of your own mind. Blessings are very important at this point but they will only descend to the extent that you have true devotion. I have experienced this myself.

The very last part of the practice is very important. It is to meditate directly on the essence of your own mind. In order for it this to be really effective, you must have no hope or fear about it. You have to have no doubt that you really did become one with the guru and no hope that there might still be something more. Thoughts of "Ah, did I really meet with the guru? Did I really become oneness with the guru? Did I really get

the blessings necessary? Did the blessings come or not come? Did I really meet with the nature of mind? Did I not meet with the nature of mind?” are the sort of thoughts that you do not need.

Whatever else happens, at this point, you must have a very powerful certainty that you actually have become oneness with the guru. So for example, in the case that your visualization was that of your guru as the deity Vajrasatva, you would be quite certain that you had become inseparable with your guru and Vajrasatva. If you go the other way and think that there is you, and then there is the deity, and then there is your guru—all those separate entities—then these kinds of blessings and the results that come from them just cannot and do not happen.

There are an extraordinary number of statements in the Vajra Vehicle about the necessity of devotion. For example,

“It is superior to remember the guru for just one moment than it is to do hundreds of thousands of recitations of your deity’s mantra.”

And,

“It is better to offer even one butter lamp to a hair pore of your guru than it is to make many offerings to many buddhas.”

There are many different liturgies for joining your mind with the guru’s mind and thus bringing the blessings of his realization into your own being, for example, there are the various liturgies of the four sets of one hundred thousand. All guru-yoga liturgies, regardless of context, have the same basic process just described.

f. How to Please the Guru

Finally, how do you go about pleasing your guru? There are said to be three ways to please the guru. The best way is, having gotten the instructions and so forth from the guru, to go and practise them to gain accomplishment. The middling way is to attend the guru and assist him. The inferior way, by far, is to offer this and that; you offer gold and silver, you offer nice little things, to the guru. It is said that you should try to do all of those three things to please the guru.

DEVELOPMENT AND COMPLETION STAGES

Once the preliminaries consisting of the Four Mind Reversers and Four Sets of One Hundred Thousand have been done, a disciple must engage in the main practice. As mentioned in the overview, first, formal entrance to the Vajra Vehicle is obtained through a ripening empowerment. The ripening empowerment enters the disciple into the mandala of a specific deity. The deity is chosen by the guru who then bestows the appropriate empowerment. After the disciple has been entered and had his mind-stream ripened, he is given the liberating instructions that will show him how to do the practices of the Vajra Vehicle. It is after all that that the disciple undertakes the main practice of the Vajra Vehicle.

The main practice of the Vajra Vehicle is in two stages: development stage and completion stage. The development stage is where the disciple usually starts the main practice. It is the practice of visualizing oneself and one's world as the deity and its world. The deity practised is the deity whose empowerment has been received.

Thus, at this point, you as the disciple would be entered into the mandala of a deity through empowerment, would be given the appropriate instructions, and would commence development stage practice. Accordingly, very brief instructions on the development stage practice of Vajrasatva are included here.

1. Development Stage

Development stage practice is an extremely beneficial practice. You do it by doing the practice of the deity whose mandala you have been empowered into. The explanation here is an overview of the development stage of Vajrasatva, though it is given in a way that shows the principles of development stage practice in general and the explanations given do apply in general to nearly every type of development stage practice that can be done.

a. Summary of a Session of Practice

At the beginning of any development stage practice, the impure form that you have as yourself is allowed to disappear into emptiness. From the state of emptiness, the pure realm of the deity arises. Then the deity arises within that. The practices of recitation and emanation and gathering are done as the main part of cultivating the deity. Finally, the deity's environment is dissolved into the deity and that is dissolved into emptiness and then you re-emerge from that emptiness as the deity again and close the session.

b. Longer Description of a Session of Practice

You start the practice sitting there in your impure body. You dissolve that into emptiness and leave yourself in its own character in that. When you are in its own character, there

is absolutely no need for thinking, “This is empty. This is not empty.” Within that state, you need to meditate on compassion for the six classes of migrators, the ones who have not realized emptiness. Then, from within that state of empty space, your own mind in the form of a white $\text{h}\bar{\text{u}}\text{ṃ}$ letter appears very vividly. That letter melts into light and immediately turns into Vajrasatva.

Vajrasatva has a white body. He holds a vajra at his heart in his right hand. He holds a ghanta at his waist in his left. His two feet are in full vajra posture. The body can be as big or as small as you want. It could be as big as a buddha field. It could be that in every single pore of the body there is a buddha field.

The body appears but has no solidified nature to it. It is insubstantial like a rainbow. Nonetheless, all of the different attributes—the various ornaments and clothes, all of the different sceptres in the hands, and all of the parts of the body—appear perfectly distinct. Each thing is perfectly distinct but there is nothing solid; you could not grasp it with your hand.

The three places are marked at the forehead centre with a white oṃ letter, at the throat with a red $\bar{\text{a}}\text{ḥ}$ letter, and at the heart centre with a blue $\text{h}\bar{\text{u}}\text{ṃ}$ letter. These are the three vajras of enlightenment.

Light radiates out from the blue $\text{h}\bar{\text{u}}\text{ṃ}$ letter at the heart. The light goes out to the eastern-direction buddha-field of Vajrasatva called “Abhirati”. It strikes the heart centre of the Vajrasatva in Abhirati and immediately that Vajrasatva comes down and dissolves into you. Think that you and that Vajrasatva have become inseparable. Therefore, be certain that you are Vajrasatva. You have been but up till now you did not recognize it. You have the thought, “Whatever Vajrasatva has in the way of complete all-knowing wisdom, whatever

Vajrasatva has in the way of total love, whatever Vajrasatva has in the way of capability, I have all that.”

After you arise as Vajrasatva and empower yourself as such, you perform the actions that fulfil the two purposes. For the first, light radiates out again from your heart centre. That light radiates out to all of the conquerors of the ten directions. As it reaches them, it turns into a complete set of offerings for each of them. Having become offerings in that way, The Buddhas of the ten directions then transform into Vajrasatva. All these Vajrasatvas of the ten directions come down and dissolve into you, and in that way, you receive the complete blessings of the conquerors of the ten directions. Think that way.

For the second, light is sent out to all sentient beings in the six realms to purify all their obscurations and degrading actions. From the HŪM letter at the heart centre, innumerable lights radiate out to all of the sentient beings, in all places and times. The light strikes their body, speech, and mind centres and thereby clears off all of their degrading actions and obscurations, and karmic imprints. Thus, they too become Vajrasatvas and their places are the pure realm of Vajrasatva. The appearance of their sentient being bodies turns to that of Vajrasatva bodies. For example, all of the various sentient being forms in our own world, the little insects and the birds, the animals, whatever they might be, all of those turn into Vajrasatva²⁰. Likewise, all sounds turn into the sound of

²⁰ It is hard for some people to conceive of beings in the realms other than the human and animal realms. If that is difficult for you, then do not try too hard to visualize beings that you do not really know about but just have the idea that they are there and you are sending

(continued...)

Vajrasatva's mantra. Sounds of motor cars, sounds of voices, all of the different sounds that there are in the world, all of those turn into Vajrasatva mantra sound. As for the mind, all sentient beings' minds become inseparable with the mind of Vajrasatva.

Then, having established the self visualization that way, and then having empowered it that way, and then having benefited sentient beings in that way, there is the main part of the practice, which is the recitation of the hundred syllable mantra and the visualization that goes with that.

Following that, that the visualization has to dissolve. All of the deities you have visualized, all of the thoughts going on—everything contained in the whole meditation—comes and dissolves into you. Then you as Vajrasatva dissolve from outside in. You dissolve into the blue $\text{H}\bar{\text{U}}\text{M}$ letter at the heart centre. Just the $\text{H}\bar{\text{U}}\text{M}$ letter is left. Then that, melting into light starting from the foot of the letter and gradually moving upwards, dissolves into itself, so that, in the end, there is nothing left except bare emptiness—emptiness free from centre or fringe. Stay there in its own character, without altering anything. You stay in that for a few moments or as long as it lasts²¹.

²⁰(...continued)
out light to them.

²¹ There are three steps to the dissolution. First, everything around you, the whole environment, dissolves into you as Vajrasatva. In this step, all of those things that you established as being there in your meditation practice dissolve into your body one way or another. If they come in through the top, they come in through the top. If they
(continued...)

The final step is that Vajrasatva has to arise again from that emptiness. All of a sudden you reappear as Vajrasatva out of that emptiness. You once again are Vajrasatva in Vajrasatva's world, as before. You set the feeling of body, speech, and mind being the body, speech, and mind of the deity.

To complete the session, you do a dedication and that is the end of your session.

In post-attainment, you do the practice of sacred outlook in which everything is the world of the deity. All beings are known as forms of Vajrasatva's body. All sounds are known as Vajrasatva's mantra. All thoughts and concepts are known as the wisdom of Vajrasatva.

c. The Body of the Deity

How is the body of the deity that appears out of emptiness? It is not made of flesh and blood. It is made out of light but this is not ordinary light. This light is extremely brilliant. It is like a hundred thousand suns. Even though the body has the appearance of this brilliant light, the body itself is actually like space. Thus, the usual description of the body is "like a rainbow". The rainbow is as brilliant as a hundred thousand suns.

Furthermore, the body of the deity is immeasurable. That does not mean that it is big, it means that it does not fit into our measurement system which is a conceptual approach to reality. It is such that the body of the deity could have a hun-

²¹(...continued)

come in through the side, they come in through the side. If they come in from the bottom, they come in from the bottom. They just all dissolve into you. Second, you as Vajrasatva dissolves into the $\text{h}\bar{\text{u}}\text{ṃ}$ letter at the heart centre. Third, that dissolves into itself.

dred thousand world systems within each pore of that body. Therefore, whether you meditate on it as being small or large, either way, is fine.

i. Three Key Points of Visualization of the Body

The first key point is called “clear visualization”. The body of the deity is like space yet every detail of the body has to be in place. Moreover, each detail is perfectly clear and distinct; one detail should not bleed into another, as if it were a bad painting, or poorly visualized.

Clear visualization does not come without a lot of practice. It is more than likely that you will not see yourself clearly as Vajrasatva at first. You might have a moment of visualization then your body will shift here or go somewhere else. Or, you might have a white body which suddenly becomes a blue body. That is what happens. The way to go about the visualization is not to try to see every single detail clearly and all at once in the beginning. There are two different approaches you can take to developing the visualization. The first is that, when you remember your house, you get an image of the whole thing all in one place even without seeing all of the details, so, when visualizing yourself as Vajrasatva, try to visualize the whole thing all at once, without necessarily having all of the details clearly present. The second is to approach the whole thing in a bit-wise fashion. You start with one particular, an ornament, or one of the silks, etcetera, and get that clear. Then you build on that. You go to another one and get that clear. In that way, you go through all of the particulars and build up the visualization. To help the process, you can get a representation of Vajrasatva such as a statue or painting. Look at that from time to time and apply that to your practice; it will help to accomplish the visualization.

These days, women sometimes ask whether they can visualize a female version of a male deity. The answer is that you need to practise the deity according to how it is. If it is male, you visualize it that way; if it is female, you visualize it that way.

The second key point is called “thorough recollection of purity”. It means that, as you visualize the deity with all of its attributes, sceptres, and so on, you have to know what each item represents.

The third key point is called “pride of the deity”. It means that you have to really think that you are the deity. You might not be able to see yourself clearly as the deity with all of the ornaments and attributes, each in their own place. Nonetheless, you must have the thought “I am the deity”, which means that you have the confidence that you really are the deity.

ii. Benefits of Visualizing Yourself as the Deity

Meditating on the form of the deity, which is done as described above, has extreme benefits. One is that it helps to develop your shamatha practice. Why? Because to do this kind of visualization, you have to develop the ability for the mind to abide one-pointedly, without any distraction, and that is the meaning of shamatha practice. Secondly, you have all the benefits of meditation in general according to the sutra vehicles but you also obtain all of the powers, capabilities, and blessings of the deity because of doing a development stage kind of meditation.

d. The Speech of the Deity

For speech, you recite the mantra of the deity. The essence mantra of Vajrasatva is OM VAJRASATVA HŪM. The full mantra is called the “hundred letters” and you can find that written down elsewhere.

e. The Mind of the Deity

In the main part of the practice, you as the meditator are thinking that you are the deity and that all sentient beings have turned into the deity. Look right at that meditator. Who is it? It is mind that is doing the thinking! That mind is nothing whatsoever. It is completely beyond any kind of mental elaboration. It is empty. Stay there. Within that, if discursive thoughts do start to arise again, return to visualizing yourself momentarily, clearly as the deity. Having returned to visualizing yourself as the deity, look back into the essence of that again. Again, if discursive thoughts arise, visualize yourself as the deity. Then engage the mind. Having engaged the mind, return to its essence of that.

f. Effect of the Practice

In general, doing the practice of a deity again and again is the way that you progress through development stage. In particular, doing Vajrasatva practice has the special effect that it purifies the degrading actions you have committed in the past; doing the practice of any other deity will have the special effect of the blessings and abilities particular to that deity coming to the practitioner.

2. Completion Stage

After the various levels of development stage have been practised, the disciple can move onto the completion stage. As explained earlier, there are completion stages with and without signs. The practice of Great Completion belongs to the level of completion stage without signs.

PART III

MEDITATIONS

PRELIMINARY TO

GREAT COMPLETION

OVERVIEW OF SHAMATHA, VIPASHYANA, AND RIGPA

The preliminary and ancillary practices are intended to create the necessary conditions needed to do the main practice, which is to return the mind from its mistaken mode of operation, ignorance, into its original state, the knowledge of reality.

The main practice consists of two practices. Firstly, the mind has to be able to abide undistractedly on the meditations of reality. The practice for developing the mind's ability to remain one-pointedly is called "shamatha" in Sanskrit, "gzhi gnas" in Tibetan, and "calm abiding" in English. Secondly, the mind has to be able to see or have insight into reality. The practice for doing that is called "vipashyana" in Sanskrit, "vipassana" in Pali, "lhag mthong" in Tibetan, and "insight" in English.

Shamatha is a single practice of learning to make the mind abide stably on one thing. There are different ways to develop that capacity but it is still a single capability of mind that is developed.

Vipashyana is the practice of insight but there are many levels of insight and hence many practices of vipashyana. There is the mundane vipashyana that ordinary people use when they investigate something and make a decision about it. In those cases, the vipashyanas are gaining insight into the fictions that make up mundane realities. Then, there are the vipashyanas used by spiritual practitioners to gain insight into actual reality. In Buddhist practice, these look at the emptiness which is the hallmark of reality and, in order of increasing profundity, there are the vipashyanas of the Lesser Vehicle, then of the sutra system of the Greater Vehicle, and then of the Vajra Vehicle all the way from the lowest of the tantras called Kriyatantra up to the highest ones, Mahamudra and Great Completion.

Shamatha practice done by itself has the features of abiding, non-alteration, and no-distraction. However, all of these qualities are within the framework of dualistic mind, and there is no insight into reality with it. Vipashyana can either be a mundane vipashyana which is operating in the framework of dualistic mind or it can be a spiritual practice of vipashyana which is operating within dualistic mind in an attempt to transcend dualistic mind or it can be direct insight into reality in which case it is not within the framework of dualistic mind.

The practices of shamatha and vipashyana are two, distinct practices that can be used for many purposes, both mundane and spiritual. However, for the spiritual purpose of insight into reality they do have to be joined in the end. In Buddhism, in the gradual approach, the disciple first practises them separately to prepare the tools for insight into reality then combines them in order to gain the realization of reality. In the sudden approach of the tantras, the two are practised as a unity from the beginning.

The practices of Mahamudra and Great Completion are the ultimate, sudden approaches. In them, shamatha and vipashyana are neither developed separately then combined nor practised together. Instead, the disciple is shown the nature of mind, which is unified shamatha-vipashyana to begin with, and the disciple practises at staying within that. In Great Completion, this direct experience of the nature of mind which is unified shamatha-vipashyana is called “vidya” in Sanskrit and “rigpa” in Tibetan. These words are often translated as “awareness” but that is mistaken. They both literally mean to know something in the sense of, “Oh, I see.” Thus this rigpa is more like insight than awareness, however, it has both the non-distraction of shamatha and the insight of vipashyana in it and these are present not as two things combined but as two, inseparable features of the one thing. The vipashyana component of rigpa is the direct sight of the actual nature of reality. The shamatha component is that rigpa is abiding in that direct sight of reality without any contrivance or alteration going on.

Rigpa includes the non-distraction of shamatha practice, however, there is a very big difference between the shamatha component of rigpa and the practice of shamatha by itself. Rigpa is never within the framework of dualistic mind and its non-distraction happens without the appliances of dualistic mind called mindfulness and alertness that are needed for non-distraction when shamatha is practised by itself.

In shamatha practice done as a practice in itself, the mind is taught to abide. When you have some ability at that, you sit there, abiding without any distraction from that abiding. The very core of the dualistic shamatha mind that is abiding is the non-dualistic essence of dualistic mind, which, when a practitioner meets with it, is called “rigpa”. However, even

though the abiding mind of shamatha has rigpa as its core, that is not being met with in the shamatha meditation. It is not being met with because: the practitioner does not know about it; or the practitioner does know about it but is deliberately choosing to practise shamatha only rather than going into the rigpa itself; or the practitioner has accidentally slipped from rigpa into shamatha and is mistaking the shamatha for rigpa. Shamatha alone means calm abiding within the context of mind: you stay there in dualistic mind, abiding calmly, practising at remaining undistracted. In doing so, you are practising a slightly dull and stupid state because you are staying within dualistic mind and not mixing the state of abiding with insight into reality.

There is a very big difference between a good shamatha practice—one in which the mind has become well-tamed and is just abiding, has mindfulness and alertness, and is without discursive thoughts—and rigpa. The state of shamatha is something which does not have a recognition of the essence of mind occurring within it. The alertness that it has is an alertness, not a vipashyana. The alertness is part of dualistic mind that only functions to know that the mind has become distracted from its object, no more and no less. The recognition of the essence of mind, which is the special recognition that is spoken of in Great Completion, is one in which the natural shamatha-vipashyana of the essence of mind is recognized. When that happens, dualistic mind falls away and the name given to that non-dualistic, no-mind, actuality-of-mind is “rigpa”. Even the final realization of shamatha, in which the mind is very alert, is still within dualistic mind and there is no vipashyana seeing the nature of reality. Rigpa has non-distraction but also has the recognition of reality with it, thus, it has no mind.

Finally, the vipashyana of rigpa is the ultimate vipashyana that sees emptiness of unified appearance-emptiness just as it is. This is quite different from any of the mundane vipashyanas, or the vipashyanas of the Lesser Vehicle, Greater Vehicle, or even lesser levels of the Vajra Vehicle. Therefore, this level of vipashyana should not be confused with the vipassanas of the Lesser Vehicle, such as the practices of insight and so forth that are well known in the Theravadin traditions.

SHAMATHA

In the sutra teachings of meditation, shamatha is always characterized as the practice of “making the mind abide”. In the Vajra Vehicle, it is most common to characterize shamatha as the practice of “non-distraction”. If your mind can remain put, without being distracted, then that is the accomplishment of shamatha.

In general, there are two ways to accomplish the non-distraction of shamatha practice. One uses a support as a place to tie the mind and bring it back to, the other uses the mind itself and no other support. The first is called “shamatha with support” and the second “shamatha without support”. Shamatha with support is used both in sutra and tantra. Shamatha

without support is mainly used in tantra as part of the direct approach to reality of both Mahamudra and Great Completion. I will explain the former first.

The first point for any kind of shamatha practice is that the body needs to be straightened. There are a specific set of postures that you use to straighten the body²². By assuming these postures, it helps to undercut discursive thoughts, and that in turn assists the abiding quality of the mind.

1. Instructions on Shamatha With Support

Shamatha with support uses some thing other than the mind—called “a support”—as the place to put the mind on during the practice. Shamatha with support is also commonly referred to as “shamatha with reference point”. A support or a reference point is the thing that you keep the mind tied to and come back to when the mind has become distracted from it.

Many things can be used as a support so supports are classified in various ways. A support can be external or internal to the mind. An external support is some physical thing that you observe with one of your five senses, though for serious practise of shamatha a visible object usually is used. An internal support is a mental image that you observe with your mind.

All external and internal supports can be classified into impure and pure. Impure supports for shamatha meditation are things like a stick or a small object of any kind that is not

²² For a list of the body postures and more on shamatha with support, see *A Complete Session of Meditation* by Tony Duff, available through Padma Karpo Translation Committee.

a holy kind of object. Pure supports for shamatha meditation are things like statues or paintings of a buddha, etcetera, anything that is a holy object. Both impure and pure supports are suitable for the practice, though some people prefer the pure one because practising with it has additional merit attached to it.

To do shamatha practice using an external support, you take your support—a small stone, stick, or other small thing, or statue of The Buddha, etcetera—put it in front of you, and fix your attention on it. You use the support, which is known through the eyes, to hold your mind in place on the support. As you fix your mind on the support, you will find yourself falling into either agitation or dullness. For example, if you put a small piece of wood in front of you and watch it, you might find yourself thinking, “It’s about an inch across. It’s hard wood. It is not cherry wood.” The thoughts are agitation in the mind that are distracting you from the object and hence causing your mind to lose its abiding. When alertness tells you that you have fallen into agitation, you put your mind back on the support and use your mindfulness to station it there. You do that over and over again until the mind can abide one-pointedly.

You could do the same with an internal support instead of an external support. I have tried both techniques and, as far as I am concerned, the use of an internal support is the better one of the two. My experience has been that using a small stick, piece of wood, or any other external object to hold the mind in place is more difficult than using an internal support to do the same.

There are many different internal supports that you can use for the practice, for instance, you could use a mental image. There are many kinds of mental images mentioned throughout

the vehicles of Buddhism as being useful for this purpose. In the sutra Greater Vehicle, the use of a buddha or other holy object is popular. The Vajra Vehicle has a number of specialized techniques available. One is the meditation on a deity in development stage; in that meditation, as mentioned earlier, the specific aspect of the practice of having to keep the deity clearly and stably visualized is shamatha practice. Another is to use winds, channels, and drops as the support. Those are usually very secret practices but there are some more general ones that come from them: one is to use the winds to hold the mind in place in a practice called “the vajra recitation”; a second is to use visualized drops, called bindus, to do the same. I will explain those now.

a. The Vajra Recitation

It has been said that sentient beings themselves, in actuality, are buddha. Therefore, our speech is, in fact, buddha’s speech. If buddha’s enlightened speech is condensed down into a small formulation of primordial sounds, it comes down to the three mantric syllables, “OM, ĀḤ, HŪM”. These are joined to the process of breathing by joining them to what are called “the three natures” of the breath cycle, that is, the nature of drawing the breath in, the nature of holding it, and the nature of expelling it. It is called “vajra” because you are practising the three syllables that represent the three vajras of a buddha and it is called “recitation” because the three syllables are recited, if only mentally.

The actual practice is done as a series of cycles. The breath is cycling around and as it does so, each of the syllables is joined with its respective part of the breathing cycle. First you set your body straight and let your mind self-settle. When it is in its own character you start the cycling. As you breath in gently, you recite “OM”. Then the winds comes down a little

bit and you do the recitation of “ĀḤ”. Then as the breath goes out again, you recite “ḤŪḤ”. The recitations are done mentally. When you breath in, there is no shape, and there is no colour. There is sound. To start with, as you come in, that is the “OM” sound. As it gets brought in and held inside, that is just the “ĀḤ” sound. As it goes out, it is just the “ḤŪḤ” sound. There is not much to consider here. The sounds are the primordial sounds of the three vajras of a buddha; the sound involved is quite profound. It is something that The Buddha spoke about.

The issue here is that it is being done in the context of your being in its own character. That means everything is already at ease. Because it is at ease, there is nothing to be pressed or pushed at. The breath is just drawn in, then comes in, then goes out. That is it. When you become distracted, you return yourself to the meditation and settle back onto it again. In that way, you develop non-distraction.

There are some profound, inner instructions associated with the development of the non-distraction using this practice but I will not mention them here. Despite that, this meditation is favoured as a general meditation for beginners at least in the Vajra Vehicle because it brings profound blessings of the enlightened body, speech, and mind aspects in conjunction with a pacification of the winds all as part of the practice of developing shamatha.

b. Bindu Meditation

This practice uses visualized bindus as a support. A bindu means a round drop or globular-shaped object. The summary form of this practice is that, within the heart centre, you visualize an eight-petalled lotus, on which you visualize a radiant moon disk, on which you visualize a bindu—a small round globule of light, like a pearl. You understand that pearl to

contain all of The Buddhas and bodhisatvas and you just keep your mind on it. Once you have mastered that visualization, the full form of the meditation entails moving the bindu up and down and in and out and backwards and forwards and around and around. It is quite complex.

2. Instructions on Shamatha Without Support

Shamatha without support is shamatha done using the mind itself, as it occurs, as the support. It is without support in the sense that no object other than mind is used as the support for the meditation. It is also commonly referred to as “shamatha without reference point” where, as before, reference point has the same meaning as support.

This type of shamatha is the style of practice used as the basis for Mahamudra and Great Completion practice. It is still shamatha, so it has not yet gone beyond mind to rigpa. However, it embodies the basic approach of the higher tantras that the main point is to let the mind settle into itself. By using the style of letting the mind self-settle, the meditator comes close to the actuality of mind.

This kind of meditation has two different instructions in it: finding the meditation through abiding of mind; and finding the meditation through movement of mind. They are usually taught in that order. First you tame the mind and make it abide, then you learn to allow movement in the mind to become part of the abiding.

This practice can be a practice of shamatha in and of itself. However, the point of allowing the movement in mind to become part of the abiding has the possibility of turning the shamatha into shamatha-vipashyana and even suddenly turning into rigpa. Therefore, this approach to practice is very much

part of the instruction of both Mahamudra and Great Completion.

a. Finding Meditation Through Abiding

A common point between shamatha practice and the practice of rigpa is that the mind must be left unaltered. With the body set straight, how do you approach the mind? You do not let it chase after the past; you do not let it go out to greet the future; you keep yourself in the present. Then, as the mind sits there in there in the present, there is, at the same time, no need to stop discursive thoughts and no need to produce some further kind of discursive thought. As you practise this way, there is no need to involve yourself either in any hope nor in any kind of anxiety. You just let the mind be easy. Whatever the mind wants to do, you let it do.

Now, regarding discursive thought, there is no need to stop it. Actually you cannot stop it. In fact, if you try to stop it, it will just increase—even the thought, “I will stop this thought”, is another discursive thought that you will have produced. You simply cannot get rid of discursive thought. Even if you throw an atom bomb at it, you cannot get rid of it. So what can you do with discursive thought? What you can do is leave it alone, which is effectively saying “not altering it”. If you leave mind unaltered, then mind just naturally settles of itself.

This practice of finding meditation through abiding is the practice of bringing the mind to rest, and no more. You let the mind flop and just be still. You do the practice by not pushing anything away and not furthering anything either. Not furthering anything, means that you do not produce any further kinds of discursive thoughts. For example, if you think you have become distracted, you do not get yourself upset over that. Rather, you do not think about it any further but just

come to rest again. The oral instruction that sums all of this up is,

“Rest in its own character, neither stopping nor furthering anything.”

(1) Discursive Thought Explained

Discursive thought means that, on the basis of one thing that arises in any of the six consciousness, you have a thought, one or more. It means a discourse that you make on the immediate moments of experience that occur to you.

What does it mean to be involved in discursive thought? For example, you are sitting and you start to think, “Now I need a house. And inside my house, I am going to have to have furniture, and I am going to have nice blinds on the windows. I am going to have some servants in the house, I am going to have this, and that and the other”, and you think more and more about the house that you are going to have. You are caught in a chain of thought that started with one sense impression, either from one of the five senses or mind. As soon as that chain of thought ends, you tend to go into another one, based on whatever sense impression comes next.

The Sanskrit term for discursive thought is “vikalpita”. There are all sorts of different things in your experiences of the six senses. The thing that just appears to the consciousness of any of your six senses is called “the superifice”. For example, when you see a book, the visual consciousness of a book without any thought attached to it is the visual superifice of the book. There are as many superfices as there are things that immediately appear to any of your consciousnesses. First you have one of those superfices appear to one of your consciousness and then following that you might—or might not—have

a thought about it. You might see a book and then you might think something about the book. The fact that you think about it is the “kalpita” or “thought” part of “discursive thought”. The fact that it has followed on from one of the superficialities of your experience is the “vi” or “discursive” part.

In short, your first problem is that mind is all over the place, experiencing different content or superficialities of this consciousness and that consciousness. But then, instead of just letting the impressions of the consciousnesses come and go, you compound the problem by going off on chains of thought about their content. That is discursive thought. It is a very pejorative term, indicating that your mind is just being dragged here and there, thinking about this and that.

If you were to rest your mind in its own character, as described above, it would cease to run off at the mouth, so to speak, and would settle into itself. It would become very easy and pliable. It would be there with itself. Note that we are not talking about rigpa practice here, we are talking about shamatha practice in general, though this resting in its own character is the particular style of shamatha used in both Mahamudra and Great Completion practice.

(2) Agitation and Dullness

When you do shamatha practice, there are two specific problems that arise. The first is agitation. The second is dullness and sinking.

Agitation will happen. As you let the mind remain in its own character, it sometimes happens that all sorts of discursive thought arises. It can become so bad that there is just an endless procession of this and that and blah, blah, blah about it. It seems as though you cannot make the mind come to rest. It just will not abide. So what do you do? Well, you do not

do anything especially. Instead, you just let the mind carry on. Literally. And if you do that, then eventually, it will settle. Note though, that the instruction here not to do anything does not mean that you just give up on and lose the meditation. When this kind of thing happens, mindfulness and alertness are still required. In this case, you do not bring an antidote to the thoughts and you do just let them come but there still has to be the mindfulness of being in the present and an alertness that knows that the thoughts are arising.

Aside from the mental approach to dealing with agitation, there are physical things you can do. During your session, you could lower your gaze a little bit because that brings your energy down and makes your mind more focussed. If all else fails, keeping yourself warmer rather than cooler also tends to reduce discursive thought.

The opposite of agitation will also happen, which is dullness and/or sinking. Sinking is a case where the mind just gradually sinks down and successively becomes very dull, stupid, black, dark, unconscious, and eventually falls asleep. In the case of having too much discursive thought, you want to keep the mindfulness that you are meditating. In the case of dullness, you let go of the meditation and just stay with the dullness. This often means that you will stay in a drowsy state for a little while but your mind is staying with it. When you can do it, the mind will not get lost into sleep but will wake itself up again after a little while.

Aside from the mental approach to dealing with dullness, there are physical things you can do. The first is that you can raise your gaze a little; this makes the mind more spacious and uplifts it a bit. Another thing you can do is cool the body down by taking off some layers of clothes, washing, cooling the room, etcetera. Another thing you can do is to wake yourself up by

going outside and getting some fresh air. When you go outside, if you also take off some clothing, that also cools the body down a bit. If you are wearing a lot of clothing, it will tend to keep you too warm which brings on sinking and dullness, and falling asleep comes very easily.

These two things, agitation on the one hand and sinking or dullness on the other, are the temporary experiences that occur to a meditator doing shamatha practice. They are not good or bad. They are just signs of the fact that you have been practising meditation. If you do not practise, these sort of things do not happen; if you do practise, these things can and will happen.

ii. Finding Meditation Through Movement

The practice of finding meditation through movement is very easy. Just as much as your mind moves, let it move. Whatever comes up, let it come up. Whatever it wants to do, let it do. There is a key point here, which is that whatever moves in mind has also to have a knowledge of that movement with it. It—meaning mind—knows that it is moving.

To do this practice, together with whatever kind of discursive thought happens, you have a mindfulness that knows what that discursive thought was about. For example, you think, “The carpet in front of me is very nice”, or, “The carpet is not nice”, and so on. Whatever it is, as it comes up, you also have a knowledge that tells you what that thought is about. For example, your stomach is starting to go empty and you are starting to feel hungry so you start to think about that. The thought comes, “Oh, my stomach is empty. I need food”, and with that you have a part of mind that knows that that is what you are thinking about.

In this case you allow discursive thoughts to happen, as much as they want to happen but in addition you are really paying attention to each of those discursive thoughts. You are really there with each one as it comes up. You end up having quite strong knowing with that, in the sense that a discursive thought pops up and you have a knowing that goes, “Oh, you are one of those.” And another one comes up, and you go, “Ah, yes.” And another one comes up and you go, “Aha.”

In this case you have added something to the shamatha practice, which is that you are cognizing every discursive thought as it comes. This particular type of knowing is a precursor to vipashyana. An interesting thing is that, if you really do this precisely, at some point the discursive thought will stop of itself. Then again it will start up so you apply the same technique; you let the thoughts come but you make sure you cognize them, one by one by one. This is a meditation in itself and it will help your rigpa practice.

(1) The Three of Abiding, Moving, and Knowing

In the instructions of the Mahamudra system, the disciple is taught shamatha without reference point. The instructions are the ones given above that lead to a natural development of vipashyana. There is a specific instruction that goes with this style of practice. It is called “the three of abiding, moving, and knowing”. Abiding means that the mind is abiding, not moving; there is no proliferation of discursive thought. Movement means that the mind is not abiding; there is proliferation of discursive thought. When doing shamatha practice, the mind will be in either one of these states. The knowing is that there is a part of the mind that knows that the mind is either abiding or moving.

You bring the mind down to point of being settled and you are there with that; that is abiding. All of a sudden, discursive thought arises out of that; that is moving. You train yourself so that, when it does come forth, you know that it is on the move and that is the knowing part. It is necessary to have the knowing portion of mind that registers that the mind is on the move. If you train yourself well, it will turn into a process where the mind is abiding, then it moves and just as it moves there is knowledge of the movement and that very knowledge then causes the movement to become part of the abiding. Thus, the mind goes back to dwelling because of the movement but it is the factor of knowing that causes it to do so. Once again the mind abides, then once again discursive thought shines forth, and once again, right at that point, mind knows that movement exactly, and that mere knowing brings the mind immediately back to abiding.

In this case, the factor of knowing means that you know, in both circumstances, what is happening. You know both at the time of abiding that mind is abiding and you know also at the time of movement that it has moved. Thus, you have knowing in both cases. If you practise in this way, what will happen is that the abiding factor of mind will increase in strength and you will come to a very clear, slightly empty, nothing in it, sort of abiding.

This kind of abiding is verging on vipashyana being with the abiding. It happens because the knower goes from being a clumsy alertness of the conventional practice of shamatha to a knower that is very much like vipashyana. This means that the practice can easily turn into one of unified shamatha-vipashyana that has insight into the reality of mind. This is the style of the Vajra Vehicle shamatha practice rather than the sutra vehicle shamatha which develops a very stable mind

but one that is relatively dark and unknowing. In particular, this is how the practice of Mahamudra is done according to the Four Yogas of Mahamudra.

iii. When All Else Fails

Practically speaking, when you are doing this kind of shamatha without support, if you have an extreme amount of discursive thought arising and cannot deal with it in mind, you could lower your gaze a little then let the mind rest. If that does not work, there is another technique, which is that you just give up, in a sense. You take the attitude, “All right, discursive thought can arise as much as it wants to. Just as much as it wants to churn itself out, let it churn itself out. As much as it wants to churn itself up, that is good. Very kind of it. As much as you want to come, come. Anything that wants to come can come. As much as you want to come, come.” That is how you approach it. Do it as long as you can until you are really exhausted by it. Just let it happen. At some point, you might get tired doing that. So just rest.

That was about lots of discursive thought arising. There is another possibility, which is that you might get very dull and even start to fall asleep. If worse comes to worst, you can get up, go outside, get some fresh air, look up and around, and wake yourself up.

3. Signs of Practice

At very first when you practise meditation, you don't notice anything much in mind; it seems as though nothing is happening. As you get on with your practice, it will seem that the amount of discursive thought is increasing. You will notice an extraordinary amount of discursive thought coming; one thought after another, after another, and might find yourself

thinking, “Wow, this is incredible! Previously I was able to rest quite smoothly. Now it is impossible. Mind is just churning up all this discursive thought!” It will seem to you as though discursive thought has increased but it has not. Discursive thought does not increase; it is always there in large amounts. It is just that normally, if you have not paid attention to it, you do not notice it. Now, because you are paying attention to it, you notice all of the thoughts and see that there are many of them. However, the discursive thought level has not really increased. This is called “mind abiding like a mountain stream crashing down through the rocky peaks”.

If you continue to meditate, you will begin to notice that sometimes you are distracted and sometimes not and you will begin to know the difference between distraction and non-distraction. If you continue, the non-distraction will become stronger and stronger. As you continue your practice, you will pass through the middling stage of abiding, which is called “abiding like a gently flowing river”. In this second stage, there are both distraction and non-distraction though the latter has become strong. By continuing to practise, you will reach the final stage of abiding, which is called “abiding like an ocean”. At this stage, discursive thoughts either do not arise or, if they do, they immediately return to the ocean without affecting the abiding at all, as was described earlier in the instructions on abiding, moving, and knowing. At this point there is ongoing non-distraction²³.

These three successively-more-stable levels of abiding given through the example of a river come from the Mahamudra instructions on the development of one-pointedness.

²³ In other words, a perfect shamatha has been developed.

4. Three Temporary Experiences: Bliss, Clarity, No-thought

If you go off to an isolated place and really work at your meditation practice, various seemingly-positive types of temporary experience other than the enemies of shamatha—agitation and dullness—will definitely happen to you. These things will come as a result of the practice of meditation. In the vajra vehicle, three types of seemingly-positive temporary experience are specifically mentioned: bliss, clarity, no-thought.

The first temporary experience is bliss. With this, the body has a feeling throughout of great ease. The mind likewise, will be very much at ease. At first this is a feeling of ease and that can turn into a feeling of great pleasure or bliss. If you keep working at this particular type of experience and try to develop it, what will happen is the bliss aspect will continue to increase, and that will get quite strong at some point. It is quite possible then that even though you pinch yourself or do something which would normally cause pain, that will cause bliss instead.

The second temporary experience is called clarity. It means that the mind has relaxed totally but it is not only relaxed, it has a great deal of clarity, precision. With it, you know what is going on. When this particular temporary experience of clarity becomes stronger, you will sometimes know other peoples' minds. You will actually have the higher perception of knowing what other people are thinking.

The third temporary experience is called non-thought experience. In it, the usual flow of discursive thought just ceases for a while. It easy to mistake this for realization.

It is also possible to have what is called empty experience. In this case, on your side, the solidity of the body starts to disappear and you just feel as though it is not there. On the outside, the solidity of the environment around you just starts to sort of disappear. As that temporary experience develops, things can become very transparent. It could be that there is no particular obstruction to your body any longer. For example, walls might become sort of transparent to you. This experience is connected with no-thought experience.

Continued meditation will produce these experiences. However, these are not final realizations, they are only temporary experiences which are more or less meaningless in themselves. If you look into them, these temporary experiences are not of big consequence. Therefore, it is important not to be attached to them. When they come, let them come, but do not take them as things that you should develop further. All three will develop along the path anyway, but by taking that approach, they will not lead you down a wrong path.

5. The Path of Shamatha Practice

Shamatha or calm abiding is a practice. The beginning of the practice is you with your wild mind that is very subject to distraction. At the beginning, you cannot keep your mind in one place for more than a few moments. As you do the practice of calm abiding, you start to tame the mind. Sometimes it will abide undistractedly for a while but then discursive thoughts will arise again and it will become distracted. The final realization of shamatha according to the sutra teachings is that you can place your mind on whatever you want and the mind will abide there without any distraction whatsoever, without any discursive thought whatsoever, for as long as you want it to stay there. In this, the whole emphasis is on having

a mind that can abide one-pointedly, undistractedly, for as long as needed. In the Mahamudra system of practice belonging to the tantras, there is a practice of shamatha but the emphasis, as described just above, is not only on developing a mind that not only can stay one-pointedly but also on developing a knower with it that becomes a precursor for vipashyana. Both styles of practice are good to do, however, the Mahamudra style is intended to lead directly to unified shamatha-vipashyana. Therefore, this style is more useful for anyone practising the higher meditations of Mahamudra or Great Completion.

VIPASHYANA

In this chapter, we develop insight into emptiness using the sutra teachings. The exercises used to find emptiness are not part of the practice of rigpa but are consistent with one of the special types of preliminary practice peculiar to Great Completion, which is the practice of looking specifically into mind and determining it to be birthless or not produced. The insight developed in either case weakens the strength of dualistic grasping, making it easier to recognize rigpa when the introduction to rigpa is given.

In this sutra-style approach to reality, there are two steps. First you use intelligence, known as prajna in Buddhism, to come to a correct understanding of the view. Then, you meditate on that understanding in order to gain a direct insight into emptiness.

To develop the correct view there must be some understanding of the two truths. Following that, we should look at the mis-apprehensions of dualistic mind. These were taught by The Buddha in the Lesser Vehicle teachings as part of developing the view of the lack of a personal self. Following that we will determine the view of emptiness as it is shown in

the sutra Greater Vehicle. Following that, you should combine whatever level of shamatha you have developed with the correct view to do combined shamatha-vipashyana meditation on emptiness.

1. The Two Truths

It is crucial to have a clear understanding of the two truths. If you do not, significant problems will arise as you try to understand the deeper points of the Buddhist teaching, especially in regard to the view. The two truths is a difficult topic with much subtlety. It is important to investigate it carefully till you come to a precise determination of each of the two truths separately and together, without any mixup between the two.

What are the two truths? They are called “Fictional Truth” and “Superfactual Truth”²⁴.

²⁴ “Fictional” and “superfactual” are much better translations of a key pair of Buddhist terms that have usually been translated mostly as “relative” and “absolute” respectively.

The Sanskrit term behind “fictional”, *saṃvṛiti*, is a common word that was used in ordinary language. It means “a fiction”, “a deliberate coverup”. This word was used in a variety of Indian religions, including Buddhism, to refer to the reality of ordinary beings, ones who are not spiritually advanced. The reality that these beings experience is a trumped up one, a big fiction, made up by their delusion.

The term fictional was paired with another term that was also widely used amongst Indian religions. This other term was used for talking about the reality of beings who are spiritually advanced enough to see things as they really are. The term, “*paramārtha*”, means “the spiritually superior (*parama*) fact known by mind (*artha*)”. This is the fact of how things are. In other words, it refers to the

(continued...)

Fictional truth refers to the confused appearances that sentient beings have. It is a *fiction* that they have made up but which they believe to be real. Because they do believe it to be real, it is true or a *truth* for them. Superfactual truth is the *superior*, or holy, *fact* that appears to the minds of the Noble Ones who have left confused appearances behind. It is that kind of *truth*.

Fictional truth contains all of the phenomena of sentient beings, all the things that appear because of sentient being's delusion, all of the items of that are associated with solidified existence. Fictional truth is known through rational mind, so it is not something beyond rational mind. Therefore, it

²⁴(...continued)

superior level of reality to the fictional one made up by sentient beings, a level which is known by spiritually advanced beings, and which is simply a fact—reality without any fictions. There is no equivalent for this in English so I have coined the new term “superfactual”, which is not only a very accurate translation of both the Sanskrit and Tibetan terms but also conveys the meaning correctly, as shown in this paragraph.

The two terms “fictional” and “superfactual” are used in any discussion of the two levels of reality that exist for beings as a whole: the fictional level of reality that sentient beings create for themselves by means of their delusion and the superior, factual level of reality that undeluded beings know as a fact. The terms “relative” and “absolute” sound nice but do not convey either the meanings of the original words nor the meanings that the Buddha gave to them when explaining these two levels of reality. The terms fictional and superfactual not only translate the original terms accurately but also convey the sense of the terms as used by the Buddha. Note the difference in feeling that you get when you use “fictional” and “superfactual” as opposed to relative and absolute.

is something that you can comprehend with your dualistic mind.

Superfactual truth contains all of the phenomena that belong in the category of having no production, that is, no birth, and hence no abiding in the interim, and hence no cessation afterwards. Another way to say the same thing is that it contains all of the things that are freed from the four extremes of existence, nonexistence, neither existence and non-existence, and both existence and non-existence. These phenomena are beyond rational mind. You cannot contact superfactual truth with your ordinary, dualistic, rational-type mind. However, that does not mean that there is nothing that could understand it. There is something that can understand it and the particular thing that does understand it is called “individual self-knowing wisdom”²⁵.

One of the features of the two truths is that they can and do occur simultaneously. A confused being in cyclic existence only sees fictional truth but the fiction being seen is appearing over superfactual truth which is there but not being seen due to the confusion. Another way to say this is that all the phenomena that appear to a confused being are fictional truths but those phenomena all are empty at root and their emptiness is superfactual truth. They are empty yet they appear. The way that they appear to sentient beings is as appearances of the obscuration that causes sentient beings’ confusion. Thus they are fictional realities. Nonetheless, at the same time they

²⁵ The individual in the word is explained in two ways. It is something that each individual person has and, because of it, each person can directly experience it. Alternatively, the self-knowing knows each individual thing for just what it is. Wisdom is wisdom of the buddha. Self-knowing is the wisdom as a practitioner experiences it.

appear, they are empty, which is superfactual reality. In other words, fictional truth is never separated from superfactual truth, even if the superfactual truth is not being seen.

The classic example used to demonstrate the two truths is a multi-coloured rope lying on the ground. The rope is multi-coloured, so has the possibility of looking like a snake, especially in dim light. A person comes along in the daylight and sees the rope as a rope. Another person comes along at dusk, sees the rope, mistakes it for a snake and becomes really afraid. The rope is like the superfactual truth. The person seeing it in daylight and seeing it for what it is, is like a person with wisdom who sees the superfactual truth. The person who mistakes it for something else is like the person who is creating their fictional truths. The fictional truths do not exist at all but they are still so real to the person seeing them that they can create an effect.

Are the two truths the same or different? Fictional truth has at its core superfactual truth and it is from superfactual truth that all of the various fictional truths appear. The various things that have been discussed earlier in this book—such as karma, impermanence, the qualities of a buddha, and so on—all are contained within fictional truth. When you perceive the highest level of reality, fictional and superfactual truths are unified for you. Until that time they appear as separate things.

Furthermore, the two truths contain all possible realities. There is not another third or fourth category of truth.

A buddha's qualities can be divided into two in this way: there are appearances-for-others and appearances-for-self. The appearances for others fall into the category of fictional truth.

2. The Mis-apprehensions of Dualistic Mind

For us at the moment, there is body, speech and mind and we tend to regard them as one entity because of the root problem of holding on to ourselves as a separate “I”. We make the fundamental error of believing in a separate self. With that comes a whole process of dualistic mind. That dualistic mind works in concepts, rather than seeing things as they are. That conceptual process makes a lot of mistakes about actual reality which our minds then substitute for reality. Our minds think that this faked reality based on concepts is actually true. That is exactly what fictional truth is. If you look into that fictional truth, it starts to fall apart and you begin to see the truth behind it, which is superfactual truth. To do that, you use reasoning coupled with intelligence. As you do that, the intelligence or prajna regarding emptiness is developed.

Your rational mind normally has the idea that your being—which is made of body, speech, and mind—is one thing. If you look, you will see that it wraps the whole thing up into one lump. In other words, your normal idea is that your body, speech, and mind are just the one, same thing. Let us look at that more closely. If body and mind were the same, what would be the consequence? Body has shape and colour. It also has an up and down aspect to it. It also has a big and small aspect to it. If body and mind were one and the same, then since body has those attributes, then mind would have those attributes as well. However, mind does not have those attributes. Furthermore, if mind and speech were one and the same, then since speech has sound, mind would also have to have sounds to it. However, mind does not have that attribute. Putting it the other way around, mind does not have form, shape, colour, or size to it therefore, if body and speech were the same as mind, they also would not have any of those attrib-

utes. However, that is not the case, therefore, we can say quite definitely that body, speech, and mind are not the same thing. That in turn shows that our normal, rational perception is mistaken. We see body, speech, and mind as the same but when we look intelligently into it with our prajna, we see that they are in fact different.

Rational mind makes three obvious errors that The Buddha pointed out to his followers as a way of helping them to begin to correct their confusion. The three errors are: seeing things which are in fact impermanent as permanent; seeing things which are in fact a multiplicity as a singularity; and seeing things which are in fact dependent as independent.

The analysis we did above showed that our being, which we normally tend to think of as one thing—"a singularity"—is actually three things—"a multiplicity". Look again at how you approach your body and you will see that you generally think of it as one, single thing—a singularity. However, it is easy to see that the body is not a single thing but many things—a multiplicity. Obviously, it has five limbs. Additionally, there are three hundred and sixty bones in the skeleton, thirty teeth, an enormous number of hairs, and so on. Therefore, the body is a multiplicity.

Look at how you approach your body and you will see that you generally think of it as permanent, unchanging. However, it is very easy to see that the body is not permanent. Taking a coarse approach: just as I explained previously, body means something which is dispensed with in the end; at the end of this life, you finish with your body, and it is discarded. Therefore, the body is impermanent. Taking a more subtle approach: from moment to moment, the body is changing, atomically speaking. Therefore, the body is impermanent.

Look at how you approach your body and you will see that you generally think of it as independent. However, it is easy to see that the body is not independent. Your current body depends on past karma, on the food that you have eaten, on the exercise that you have done, and so on. Its description as beautiful or handsome or otherwise depends on other people's concepts and your own, too. Therefore, the body is dependent.

You then must examine speech in the same way. Look at how you approach your speech and you will see that you generally think of it as one thing. Speech is not one thing. Why? Because you have a loud voice, a soft voice, and many different intonations of voice. Therefore, speech is a multiplicity.

Look at how you approach your speech and you will see that you generally think of it as permanent, unchanging. Speech is not permanent. Taking a coarse approach: it has differed through your various lifetimes. You have been human, a cow, and all sorts of other beings and each one had a different kind of speech. Or, if you restrict it just to this life, the pitch of your voice has been changing all through your life because of changes in your body. Taking a more subtle approach: if the voice were not changing from moment to moment, there could not, would not, be speech. Therefore, speech is impermanent.

Look at how you approach your speech and you will see that you generally think of it as an independent thing. Speech is not independent. It does not abide in its own place without reference to anything else, rather, it changes in accordance with what you want or need to express. It also changes in dependence to the health of your body and in dependence on your breathing. Therefore, speech is dependent.

You then must examine mind in the same way. Look at how you approach your mind and you will see that you generally think of it as a single thing. Mind is not singular. It has many different parts to it, for example, the fifty-two mental events and the principal minds which are the various consciousnesses. Therefore, mind is a multiplicity.

Look at how you approach your mind and you will see that you generally think of it as permanent, unchanging. Mind is not permanent. Taking a coarse approach: there have been various kinds of minds in the various different incarnations that you have had as animals, humans, and so forth. Taking a more subtle approach: the mind has always been changing from the time you were born. Therefore, mind is impermanent.

Look at how you approach your mind and you will see that you generally think of it as an independent thing. Mind is not an independent thing. It arises in dependence on anger, passion, aggression, pride, and all sorts of other things; all sorts of different circumstances and conditions come together to produce mind. Thus it is not the independent entity that you conceptually apprehend when you just think, “mind” but in actuality is a dependency.

3. Examining to Find Emptiness

You examine body, speech, and mind in that way to see whether they are permanent or not, one thing or many, and independent or not. Based on the analysis, you come to a determination, a decision about the situation as it actually is. You should have come to the understanding that these things are multiple, impermanent, and dependent. That understanding is a step forward because it is a more correct apprehension of these things. However, there is still the problem that you

think “these things”. You understand them as impermanent, and so on but you still think that there is some solid reality to them. In other words, you have cleared some of the mistakes of your rational mind but have not yet cut through the basic ignorance that is holding onto these things as being truly existent things.

Therefore, the next step is to analyse body, speech, and mind more closely to find out whether these entities really do exist, as they seem to, or whether they are actually empty of that kind of existence. If you analyse further and find that they do not exist solidly, then that will be the discovery of their emptiness.

This is called “determining emptiness” or, more fully, “coming to a determination of emptiness”. The phrase “come to a determination” is a technical term, that is used a lot in these kinds of examinations. It means that you look into something using your prajna and by examining it up and down, you finally come to a determination of what that something actually is. The meaning is similar to pinpointing something through a process of examining it or nailing something down in the end by looking at something with your own intelligence until you have come to a very clear and definite certainty about that thing.

This sequence of first gaining a correct understanding that things that constitute existence do not exist the way that they normally appear and then finding that the things do not even exist—that they are empty—is the way that The Buddha taught. He taught that way because it is a gradual approach that makes it easier to get a correct understanding and insight into emptiness.

A second point is that we have appearances come to mind but, due to the ignorance of dualistic mind, they come together

with a movement of mind that apprehends or grasps at things as being true—as solidly, really existent. The appearances themselves cannot be eliminated through the use of logic. However, the movement of mind due to ignorance that grasps at them as being true is something can be eliminated through the application of reasoning with prajna.

So, going from the start again, first you just think there is a lump called body. You have that thought. Then, if you go through a certain amount of analysis and come to a rough understanding of it, you realize that it is not singular, not permanent, and not independent. Now you have a rough understanding of how the body actually exists. If you continue on with the analysis, you will arrive at a very fine understanding of how the body exists, and that fine understanding is that the determination that body is empty.

If your body actually exists the way your mind thinks it does—as a real, truly-existent thing—then you should be able to find it, shouldn't you? You should be able to find it in the same way your mind thinks of it, as one mass that just sits there from its own side. Is there a body in the head? No. In the right and left hands? No. Is it in the legs? No. Is it in the head? No. Are the two hands your body? No. Is the upper part of your body, your body? No. Is the chest area your body? No. So, the conclusion is that you have no body? If you say in reply, "I am not sure; there is something here", then my answer is, "That exactly is what we call confusion!"

Someone might say, "You can't just take the pieces of the body apart and say, therefore, that there is no body! When you put all the pieces together, then what you have is the body. You add the head, and the legs, and the this, and the that, and the other, and then there is the body".

The answer is, “We just did an analysis and at the end came to the conclusion that there was no body. Do you accept that? Think about the hairs on your head. If you did not have one hair on your head, could you have any of the hairs on your head?”.

Someone replies, “No”.

The answer is, “Then, using the same reasoning, if the head of the body, and so forth, do not in the end constitute a body, doesn’t that draw the conclusion that there is no body?”.

Someone replies, “Just like the forest depends on trees, so the body depends on its various parts, but that does not mean that there is not a forest and likewise that there is not a body.”

The answer is, “The same reasoning applies and it is quite subtle. You have to think about it very carefully. We went through the different parts of the body and decided they individually did not contain the body. Therefore, if you take the individual parts which do not contain body and put them together, can something which, to begin with, does not have body (think about this very carefully), end up having a body? For example, if there is one grain of sand, there is no oil, and then no matter how many grains of sand you put together, you will not get any oil!”.

Someone might say, “I do not think that we have a body in the sense of an independent body because the whole body depends for its existence on all its different parts. If there were not a heart, then there would not be a body. If there were not all the cells, there would not be a body. Similarly, the body depends on things outside itself for its existence. It depends on water, food, air, sun, and so on. However, when you have

all of those parts and dependencies, you do have a body, just as with the whole is greater than the sum of the parts!”.

The answer would be, “The whole that you think is greater than the sum of the parts is just the conceptual label that you put on it. There is no actual thing there which can be found that is something greater than the whole. The very analysis just done shows that you cannot find anything other than parts. This very thing that you think is the sum of the parts is just a conceptual superimposition that you are adding onto what is really there. There is a term for that; in Buddhist philosophy we call it “exaggeration””.

Thus we decide that the body is merely a collection of parts. Now let us look at the parts. Let us take the arm, for example. If we were to slice up the arm surgically, you would see that it, too, is just a collection of parts. What is an arm? It nothing other than a name given to a certain area of the body. You can cut it into say eight parts and none of those will be an arm. You can look in each of those parts and you will not find an arm. Let us say that the hand is one of those eight parts. Let us cut the hand up further into eight segments. If you look into those eight segments, you will find that the hand is not in any them, either.

Here is another way to analyse at it. It is done using directionality. Take your hand. Is the front of the hand the hand? Is the back of the hand the hand? Is the left side of the hand the hand? Is the right side of the hand the hand? No. Whichever side you look at, there is no hand there. However, the concept of a hand does come based on the presence of all the directional sides of the hand. That was an analysis based on four directions. We could continue on using each of the four intermediate directions, then the eight sub-intermediate directions, and so forth, but still would not find a hand, even

in those sub-directions. If you do find a hand in one of the directions, it will mean that you have four or, if it were found in the next step of eight intermediary directions, you have eight hands. If you were to thoroughly analyse the body in the same sort of way, you would end up having thousands of bodies. Actually, it would be even more than that because you would get down to things like pulling out and examining each hair individually and would be saying that each one of those was a body. Therefore, you would have hundreds of thousands of bodies.

No matter how you go with this dissection, you still will not be able to find the hand, or body, or whatever. And if you keep going down far enough, of course you are going to get down to molecules. And those molecules are made up of atoms. Therefore, the whole body is just made up of atoms.

In our Buddhist philosophical tradition, there are four main schools of philosophy, which are a sequence of approaches to reality going from the coarsest to most subtle. The first school belongs to the Lesser Vehicle and their approach stops at the point we just arrived at. They are called the Vaibhashikas and we described their view in an early chapter when discussing impermanence; you might want to look at that again, starting on page 35.

The Vaibhashikas say that you cannot go any further than atoms. For them atoms are not divisible, therefore, they assert that atoms as the ultimate reality of physical things. There is a sort of fear that comes up for them at this point. They feel that, if you starting looking any further into atoms, you might lose existence all together. They are too afraid to go further—even though they could—so they make discrete atomic particles as their ultimate realities on the physical side. They do a similar thing with consciousness, too, though they

do it on the basis of moments of time. They dissect consciousness and determine that there are individual instants of consciousness that cannot be subdivided further and which are the fundamental units that make up mind. Then they assert that those are ultimate realities on the mind side.

They put their view into effect like this. They say that anything that can be destroyed is not an ultimate truth and anything that cannot be destroyed is an ultimate truth. Thus, a thing, such as a glass, does not really exist but the indivisible atoms that make up the glass really do exist. For example, if you took a hammer, the glass could be shattered. Since it would cease to exist at that point, they posit that as a fictional truth. However, the atoms that make up the glass, they claim, are not destructible, and therefore they posit those atoms as superfactual truths.

Modern-day scientists have surpassed their view because they have shown that even atoms themselves are made up of sub-atomic particles and, going even further, even those particles are nothing more than energy. Nonetheless, scientists also have the same problem as the Vaibhashikas. They are afraid to go further because they think they will lose existence and, because of that, they still do not get to the bottom-most fact, which is that even atoms are empty of being atoms and energy is empty of being energy.

Scientists have analysed things down to atoms and atoms down into particles and then, by looking further, have found that the particles are just energy. There is a group of Buddhists these days who get very excited about this. They proclaim loudly and proudly about how modern science has found emptiness in this way. Unfortunately, they are just parading their own lack of understanding of emptiness. Is finding that atoms are just made up of energy the same as finding empti-

ness? No, because the energy that scientists talk about is still an appearance of dualistic confusion. Scientists have cut atoms up, and cut them up further, and cut them up further, and in the end, they have decided that the only way you can describe them is as mathematical models. Those mathematical models are descriptions of energy. What scientists cannot, have not, do not, or will not do is to take the next step, which is to say that there really is not any energy there, either. That is the bridge they cannot cross. Why can't they cross that bridge? Because the whole world apparently is all around them and that world is apparently made up of energy and they, like the Vaibhashikas, still hold to that as existing, conceptually.

To say it again, Buddhists and scientists both break things down, step by step, through their gross form, down through their atomic form, down to the fact that atoms are energy. Both have gotten as far as proclaiming that everything is just energy, because of having gone past even the idea of atoms. However, scientists are stuck there and cannot go the step further that we, as Buddhists can and do take. They are stuck there because the next further step they would have to take is to say that there is nothingness but they cannot say that because their delusion tells them that everything is not only here but really is here. They do not know how to go past their own delusion. However, we understand that the world does not materially exist the way they think it does. We understand that the whole world is just a fiction; it is just a fictional reality or fictional truth. Because of that, we can understand that the energy that makes up the world is totally empty of real existence yet the world can still exist in a fictional way.

If we continue to apply logic as we have been doing, we cut phenomena down, and cut them down, and cut them down, and in the end do get to a point where any given thing, includ-

ing atoms and energy, is eliminated. We were discussing a hand and how that is made of atoms and they are made of sub-atomic particles and energy. If you do this examination and look very carefully, you will find that the so-called hand you cut down and sliced up into atoms does not even have atoms that are really there. Thus you find that there is no hand even based on atoms.

When the Vaibhashikas looked into body and speech, they did it by looking at atoms because atoms are the components of physical things. Thus, we could go through the same kind of examination we have just done for body but with speech. We would find that speech does not exist truly. It also is empty.

Mind is not produced from atoms. It is produced from a stream of moments of consciousness. So, when the Vaibhashikas looked into mind, they did it by looking at moments of time. Again, you might like to review the section on this on page 35. Let us continue on with their method, using time as the basis for determining the emptiness of mind.

Generally we say that mind exists. Now, does it have parts? If we use time as the basis for the examination, we say that it does have parts: past moments, future moments, and the present moment of mind. We have already decided that past and future moments do not exist because they have gone and not come, respectively. Thus mind, if it exists, exists only as the very present moment of mind. We take the present moment of mind and look at that. Is there a continuity between the present moment of consciousness and its immediately past moment; do they touch or not? On examination, you find that you cannot cut the present moment of consciousness up so that it also has a past or future moment. If it had either one, you would lose that present moment; you would

have a new present moment that was smaller. If you keep going with that, in the end you find that you cannot find the impermanent thing we decided was “mind”, because you cannot find even a moment of mind that would make up that thing, mind.

In other words, if you keep going with that process, you find that it is just like body and speech in the sense that first we found that there was a body and a speech which were impermanent, multiple, and dependent but then, by careful dissection, those things could not be found. We arrived at the determination that, in reality, there is no body, is no speech, which was their emptiness. In the case of mind, we decided that there was an impermanent mind but by using the possibility of there being a past and future mind, and then dissecting on that basis, we arrived at the determination that there was nothing there. That was the emptiness of mind.

In this way, first you come to the coarser level of understanding of reality of the Lesser Vehicle and then you come to the much more subtle view of emptiness of the sutra Greater Vehicle. We did this using body, speech, and mind because these things are personal to us and easier to practise with at first. However, in the sutra Great Vehicle, you are supposed to do these kinds of analysis for every phenomenon, one by one, so that in the end, you determine that every single phenomenon is empty of true existence. That is the view of the Great Vehicle. It is what the Prajnaparamita sutra talks about when it says,

“... no visual forms, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind ...”

4. Unified Appearance-Emptiness

When you do these kinds of analysis, you find that is no thing existing in fact. This is so because everything that does appear is just an appearance of confusion. Confusion paints a world full of things that exist when in fact none of those things are really there. They are fictional truths. However, no matter how much confusion appears, the things of confusion are never really there. That absence is superfactual truth.

That thing which is not existing there somehow has an opportunity to come out in such a way that we think it exists. It comes because of the fact that there is emptiness. If there were not emptiness, all of this apparent existence around you could not come into appearance. Therefore, if you really understand it, you will understand that the two things, emptiness and appearance, come together, inseparably and simultaneously. That understanding that the fictional truth and superfactual truth are simultaneously present, is the ultimate truth, the highest level of understanding.

Emptiness is like a conjurer's illusion. This is not the sleight of hand of Western magicians but real magical illusions made by magicians in the East, who do something to produce an appearance that you would swear is really there when in fact it is not. They use some substances, mantra, and the power of mind to make things such as a house appear. You can touch it. You can go inside it. You can drink the water inside the house and it will actually fill your stomach for a while. Later when the whole thing is finished, suddenly your stomach will suddenly feel empty. Now say that there were a magician here doing that. Would you say that house was real or not?

The illusory house does not have a single atom to it. It is something which, not being there at all, appears to be there. That is how our fictional truth world works. It appears and we really believe it is there, however, it is empty, not really there. Understanding fully the unreal existence of it is to understand the fictional and superfactual levels of truth together.

Another example is that of a dream. You dream of a house with your family and the food and all the other things inside the house. That house is not something that really exists in any way at all. There is no physical substance to it at all. Still, I ask you, "Is it possible for a house that is nothing at all to appear like that?" It is quite possible for you to dream of the whole world being present in a dream, and yet, the moment you wake up, there is not a single whisker of that world that was in the dream there any longer. All of our current appearances are just the same.

There is nothing really present in terms of form. Form is what you see with your eyes. There is nothing really present in terms of what you hear. Smells are the same. Tastes are the same. Your body, also, is not here. Nothing is actually present but everything is appearing, like a dream. If you really understand that key point, then the whole mistaken world just gets cleaned off. Your current appearances will not appear. This body will not be present.

Where do all of these appearances come from? They come from mind. There is absolutely nothing outside of that that is actually produced at all. What is mind? The very core of mind is a type of knowing which never had any of the complexities of dualistic mind present. That core of mind is completely free from elaboration, the process that produces the dualistic

appearances. It is called wisdom. When you become that kind of knowing, you attain buddhahood.

How does a buddha come about? It comes about when a person realizes the nature of their own mind, the very essence of mind, which is divorced from the whole process of production of conceptualized phenomena.

A buddha cannot be burned by fire, harmed by water, and so on. It is not possible for any physical thing to harm The Buddha. Why? Because a buddha has completely liberated himself from grasping and in doing so has gone beyond all of the conceptually produced phenomena of our dualistic existence. The Buddha does not have a conceptually produced body that is produced in the same way as our bodies. That being so, his body cannot be burned by the conceptually produced fire of our existence, drowned by its water, and so on.

5. The Four Extremes

Our dualistic mind works in concepts and these concepts are not reality. For example, if you examine the phenomena that make up your being and your world, you find that your mind either says that they are existent or non-existent. You find that it pigeon-holes everything into these conceptual slots. There are also the possibilities, conceptually speaking, that something both exists and does not exist, or neither exists and does not exist. These four possibilities are rationalized pictures of reality that overstate or understate the reality to which they refer. Thus they are a set of four extremes that dualistic mind uses to relate to the actual fact of phenomena. When you examine phenomena closely, you find that the reality of phenomena is absent of these extremes of existence and non-existence. This then, is another way to find the reality of

phenomena, which is that they are empty of all the rational-mind produced images that we usually take to be their reality.

Thus, for example, your body does not exist²⁶. Why? Because, fundamentally speaking, it doesn't come into existence²⁷. This body is also not non-existent²⁸. If you were going to have something that was non-existent, first you would have to have something that was existent which upon being eliminated would become non-existent. But, if there is no existence to begin with, then could be no non-existence to follow that—and the body is just non-existent to start with.

The body is also not both existent and non-existent because the two paired is still an extreme. It also cannot be neither of the two at the same time because it is still a conceptual extreme that is an exaggeration over what actually is. In other words, if there were something that was both existent and non-existent, then you are still setting up some kind of conceptual idea of reality that implies existence of that thing, because you have said that it is. That is an overstatement.

²⁶ There is a difficult point here in this discussion, which is that there are several words for “exist” in Tibetan where we have just the one word, “exist”. One of the Tibetan words means “exist solidly, a conceptualized version of exist”. That is the word that has been flagged here. Currently, we have no way around this problem in English and it is always a problem for everyone when this matter is being explained. You will have to read carefully and judge when “exist” or “existence” or “existing” refers to a conceptualized, extreme existence or whether it refers simply to the fact of being present.

²⁷ This again is a use that means “solid existence, a conceptualized version of existence”.

²⁸ This again is a use of existent that means “solidly non-existent, a conceptualized version of not existent”.

Similarly, if you said that something were neither existent nor non-existent, it would not work because you would still be setting up a conceptual reality that implies the existence of a non-existent thing. That also is overstatement.

In terms of the four extremes, first the sutra approach looks at existence, refutes it logically, and so stops the apprehension of existence. It does that for each and every phenomenon. To do that, you have to meditate for a long time. Over a period of time, if you are not careful, you will develop a concept of grasping at non-existence. Therefore, at that point, you have to determine that things are likewise non-existent. After that, there are a few philosophers who get very smart with concepts and, because of that, the remaining two of the four extremes also have to be dealt with. If, in our conventional way of doing things, you posit that there is a glass, that it exists, then likewise you have to posit that there is such a thing as the non-existence of the glass. When you examine a phenomenon properly, the fact that it is empty yet apparent stops the third extreme of being both existent and non-existent and also the fourth, if you understand the logic.

Another way to say it is like this. First your mind puts up the idea that there is existence, so you analyse and find, “No, not existence.” Then comes non-existence, so you analyse and find, “No, not non-existence.” Then somebody could get smart and say, “There is both existence and non-existence.” So you, looking into it carefully, would understand, “No, not existence and non-existence.” Then somebody could get even smarter and say, “Not existence and non-existence.” Then you would, look into it, get even smarter and understand, “No, not not existence and non-existence.”

You continue your analysis for all phenomena and determine that not one thing is existent, non-existent, both, or

neither. You find that these phenomena are not there, the way your dualistic mind tells you that they are, at all. We say that they are empty meaning that they are empty of the conceptualized existence that your dualistic mind says is there. Nothing is there yet, like the reflection in the mirror, like a magical illusion, like the appearances of a dream, things do appear.

Examine the issue as I have just explained it. Go through it carefully, examine it well, and try to come to a conclusion about it. If you go through it very carefully and come to a decision, you will ascertain that things are empty yet while being empty are also appearing.

Until you do arrive at a thorough comprehension of that particular conclusion, you will continue to wander on in the three realms of existence. And for as long as you are burdened under the control of confusion in that way, you will continue to be uncertain about all of this. “Do I have a body or not, really? Are these things present or not, really?”

6. Taking the Analysis Into Meditation

You should take the instructions given above and use them. First let your mind settle according to the instructions of shamatha. Then use that settled state of mind to examine things in the way that I have discussed. This is where the non-distraction of shamatha aids vipashyana and allows it to be more penetrating. Try to dissect things to the point where you see that they do not really exist. When you see that they do not really exist, in other words, that they are empty, let your mind rest on that meaning. Just sit there and rest in its own character with that realization of emptiness. If that realization becomes disturbed, then can go back and do some more examination. When you come to some insight into their emptiness, again rest in its own character on that insight.

This view of things being empty yet at the same time apparent is not the final view according to the tantras but is getting very close to it. Therefore, to meditate on this is an absolute necessity. Why? Because you can eliminate most of the coarse dualistic grasping by doing so. If you can actually come to this conclusion not merely as a religious fact but as an actual result of your analysis, the recognition of rigpa when you do get to Great Completion practice will be very easy.

7. Fear

When beginners do this kind of examination, a certain amount of fear can arise. You have not arrived yet at a really clear certainty about this so you still have a little bit of confusion of the sort, “How is it really?”, and then you start to get a little bit afraid when you look into it.

One time, a while ago, I was explaining dharma to one person. He had this kind of fear and, sometimes, when walking, he would have to stop. He couldn’t go on. He was afraid that he would just fall into emptiness. So he said to me, “If emptiness is like that, aren’t we just going to fall in?” I replied, “Are you going to be the one who falls in?” It stopped his mind a little bit. He said, “Oh.” Then he understood a little. Everything is empty, including the person who is afraid.

If you practise the meditation on emptiness, you might start to contact that emptiness and then, because you see that you are going to dissolve, you become afraid. There is a Great Vehicle sutra that explains clearly the events on the occasion when The Buddha started explaining the full emptiness of the Great Vehicle to the Lesser Vehicle arhats. Some of them, because they had only understood a partial emptiness of the person up to that point, became very afraid when The Buddha went further and introduced them to the full, two-fold empti-

ness of the Greater Vehicle. Some were so afraid that they had heart attacks and died.

8. Grasping at Truth is Stopped by Meditation on Emptiness, Not Appearances

Sometimes there is a question about whether this kind of meditation on emptiness eventually causes phenomena to cease. Phenomena do continually appear. You cannot stop them. They are just there. We do not say that you suddenly are not going to see things. That would actually be kind of like an idiot's approach. We are here. These things do appear to us. That is how it is. However, we do say that appearances of dualistic mind are confused and, because they are confused, you cannot find them in fact.

It is not explained anywhere in our tradition that appearances are to be stopped through the application of reasoning. What we do say is that grasping at true existence is to be stopped by reasoning and by that means confused appearances are brought to an end. This does not mean that mere appearances will cease. This kind of meditation which uses reasoning to find emptiness attempts to eliminate the grasping at truth that solidifies appearances and that is all; it makes no attempt to stop appearances through the application of reasoning.

The grasping at truth that is stopped by reasoning is the deep feeling in the mind, "It exists. It is there. I exist. I am here. That is over there. It is here. It is permanent. I am me, him, her. Up, down, big, small, good, bad, something to stop, something not to stop." All of that is grasping at existence in things and it apprehends something which is not there. Appearances with that mixed in are appearances of confusion. For example, with fire, you do not just think but believe deep in your mind that you are here and that there is fire there.

Because you really believe that, it will burn you—it does burn you. That is what we are talking about when we say confused appearance. The root behind all of these different graspings is the twin, deep-rooted belief, “I am here. It is there.”

The statement, “Appearances are not stopped by reasoning, grasping at true existence is stopped by reasoning” is made specifically in relation to the approach being discussed in this chapter, of finding emptiness through reasoning. In this approach, you specifically use reasoning to stop the grasping at things being true. Later, the path itself will eventually stop the impure appearances and will open you to the pure appearances of enlightenment, but that is much further along.

9. Equality Through Emptiness is not Sameness of Appearance

Mind is the source of all confused appearances. Confused appearances are the fictional truth level. When those appearances are carefully examined, they are found to be empty. Their emptiness is the superfactual truth level. Emptiness does not mean that everything is the same, though. Glass, paper, table, floor, chair, person, house, and so on all are empty but are different in the way that they appear. In the terminology of the Great Vehicle, we say that all phenomena are equal in being empty but have different superficialities. In other words, all apparent phenomena are equal in being empty but are different in the specifics of their appearance. For example, all types of fire burn, because the nature of fire is that it is hot and burning but each fire is a specific fire, different from other fires.

10. Going Astray in Regard to Emptiness

There is a warning for you in regard to this kind of analysis and meditation on emptiness. We have been wandering around in cyclic existence from beginningless time and have a very powerful habit of seeing things as they are not. Therefore, meditation on emptiness can go in mistaken directions. Because of this, you need to put a lot of effort into getting it correct. If you do not do it the right way, your very long-term mistaken habits can actually increase.

There are two big dangers connected with emptiness. They are two ways in which you can go astray in understanding emptiness and each has serious consequences.

a. Turning Emptiness Into a Thing

The first way that you can go astray is to come to a conceptual apprehension of emptiness and decide that that concept of emptiness is actual emptiness.

There are quite a few people who say, “Yes. All things are empty”, then take emptiness as being a conceived-of thing. They fixate on it as a sort of dimension of emptiness which is there, existing in its own place, separate from phenomena. Sometimes they use fancy words such as “field”, “dimension”, and so on to describe it. That is a major mistake. If you apprehend an emptiness in that way, you are conceptually grasping at it. When you have grasped at it, you have bound yourself, and you continue on in cyclic existence.

There is a famous statement which says, “A person who holds on to things as being truly existent is stupid as a cow. A person who holds on to non-things is even more stupid than that.” Non-things means emptiness taken as a thing.

Then, The Buddha himself said, “You could have a view of the self as large as Mount Meru and that would not be difficult to deal with. However, if you have a solidified view of emptiness, that would be very difficult to deal with”.

Nagarjuna said that emptiness is intended to be the medicine for ignorance but if you develop of a conceptual view of emptiness, the view of emptiness itself has become an incurable disease.

Sentient beings are the beings towards whom you have compassion. Whether you see them in their various forms of the six classes of migrators or not, they are there. Sentient beings and their appearances are part of tictional truth. None of these solidified appearances of fictional truth exist in superfactual truth; there are no sentient beings, no buddhas, no karma, nothing at all. From the standpoint of superfactual truth, all dharmas, whatever they might be, do not truly come into being. All of them, in other words, are empty. Even emptiness itself also is empty. Why? Because emptiness is something that does not truly exist, either. The main texts of the sutra Greater Vehicle that expound the bodhisatva’s practice of emptiness are the Prajnaparamita sutras. In them, The Buddha enumerates eighteen types of emptiness. One of the eighteen is called emptiness of emptiness. Emptiness of emptiness was taught precisely so that this point would be understood.

In short, a true, direct perception of emptiness will not involve mind, and hence will not involve any dualistic concept about the emptiness. Thus, anyone who thinks that their concept of emptiness is emptiness has not only made a mistake but, because that person always remains within dualistic mind when the point is to get out of it, the person has set up a major obstacle to being able to see emptiness directly.

This discussion was about how taking emptiness as a truly produced phenomenon is a mistake. It is a very, very important point. Please keep it in your mind.

b. Turning Emptiness Into Nihilism

There is another kind of mistake that can happen in approaching emptiness. It is that, in deciding that all phenomena are truly and completely empty, somebody might go to the extreme of saying, “Since emptiness is nothing whatsoever, and since everything is empty, it means that there is nothing whatsoever, and that would include there also not being karma or the process of karmic cause and effect.” That kind of view is known as the nihilistic view. A person holding that view then concludes that they can do anything they want, without any consideration of karmic cause and effect. That is a very big mistake.

Previously there was a meditator sitting on top of a hill, meditating. There were a lot of mice running back and forth and that bothered the meditator. This meditator considered that everything was totally empty, in the wrong way just mentioned, so he picked up his big boot and killed one of the mice. This is called “losing the conduct”. Why? Because you have a view of emptiness but you are making a mistake with regard to how to act given the realities of karmic cause and effect.

When you are actually meditating on emptiness, there is nothing there to be grasped at, nothing there to be apprehended whatsoever. It really is, at that point, empty of everything, karma, cause and effect included. However, you still have to rise from your seat and at that point, you are not free of karmic cause and effect until you are a buddha. Once you are a buddha, you can do anything you want. It is a crucial point that until you are a buddha, you are not past these things. Therefore, until you are a buddha, you should accumulate as

much merit as you can and that can only be done through a consideration of karmic cause and effect.

11. The Correct Approach to Emptiness

The Buddha said that emptiness is beyond the four extremes. That is because the four extremes are the ways that rational mind understands any phenomenon and emptiness is not within the domain of rational mind. You can look for emptiness with your rational mind but you will never directly perceive it with that. This is the meaning of “emptiness is inconceivable” where “inconceivable” means that emptiness literally cannot be known through dualistic concept.

When you have rational mind, your mind is working in a process of this and that. It only works in the mode, “It is this, it is that.” There is no way to go around that; that is how rational mind works. Rational means a mind that works in ratios; it works in the domain of this versus that. To get outside that domain, you have to leave rational mind.

The four extremes sum up the domain of this and that. Therefore, you go beyond them and leave that domain behind. When you do that, it is a truly amazing experience. We are so accustomed to the process of finding some thing, but in this case, there is no thing to find. This emptiness is the complete actuality of all phenomena. It is quite possible, for example with a drinking glass, to come to a direct knowledge of the glass as being beyond the four extremes.

A glass does not (truly) exist, does it? How are you going to prove that? Look into it. Look into it on the basis of atoms, look into it on the basis of time, and you will not be able to find it. You have found that it is empty. Thereby you have stopped the extreme of existence. However, it is not merely

empty; while it is being empty, it is still appearing. Thereby, you have stopped both existence and non-existence. If you have stopped existence and non-existence, then both combined has also been stopped. Finally, if there cannot be existence and cannot be non-existence, then there also cannot be not existence and not non-existence.

That kind of emptiness that you have arrived at, where the thing is empty but appearing is the reality of all phenomena.

12. Prajna Determines Emptiness, Wisdom sees Emptiness

In the sutra system, emptiness is determined using prajña. Prajña is one aspect of dualistic mind. It is the intelligent aspect of mind that can look into a situation and accurately assess “it is this, not that”. The sutra system itself says that when you practise using prajña as the means of perceiving emptiness, it will take one great aeon—the time taken for our whole universe to come and go—to arrive at the path of insight where you do obtain a direct perception of emptiness. Now dualistic mind is eliminated on the path of insight. And that means that prajña—because it is part of mind—is also eliminated by the arrival at the path of insight. At the path of insight, you go past prajña and arrive at wisdom.

The Buddha gave an example in the *Sutra Requested By Kashyapa* of how prajna is used as the means to find emptiness but is eliminated at the end of the process. He said that it is like two sticks rubbed together to make fire; the two sticks catch fire and in the end are consumed by the fire. Like that, you develop your practice of seeing emptiness through prajña. You work and work at it then, in the end when you come to the path of seeing, the prajña itself is consumed by the blaze of wisdom that occurs.

Thus, the sutra system of the Greater Vehicle starts in rational mind and goes step by step using rational mind to go beyond rational mind. It is a long and involved process because the concepts of rational mind, which is the endless variety of all phenomena, have to be investigated and emptied one by one. In the case of tantra, for example with the rigpa practice of Great Completion, you follow a different approach. You are shown wisdom in the form of the essence of mind and just stay in that. In other words, in the tantric approach you bypass rational mind and go directly to wisdom.

13. The Benefits of Meditation on Emptiness

Done correctly, the meditation on emptiness is extremely beneficial. Even just having the doubt that things might be empty is exceptionally powerful. At first, we do not even think that things might be empty. But at some point, by meeting these teachings and doing the practice, the thought can arise for the first time, “Hmmm, maybe things are empty?!”. Even just having that first suspicion that things might be empty can clear off thousands and thousands of aeons worth of degrading actions and obscurations.

It is said that one moment of meditation on emptiness is more valuable than practising perfect discipline for thousands of years. Why? Because emptiness is the real antidote for degrading action. It is also said that one moment of actual meditation on emptiness achieves an amount of merit that is equivalent to giving large amounts of gold and silver to all the beings in the world for at least one hundred years. And it is said that one moment of meditation on emptiness is more valuable than making various offerings of all different types to all The Buddhas.

14. Encouragement to Practise

There are three vehicles of Buddhism and each one has its own view. Therefore, the view of meditation could be explained using any one of the three vehicles. If we explained the view of the Lesser Vehicle, we would be explaining a view of itemized phenomena, individual discreet phenomena, understood correctly, and taken one by one. If we explained the view of the Greater Vehicle according to the sutras, we would be explaining the view of reality which is the is-ness²⁹ of phenomena. If we explained the view of the Greater Vehicle according to the tantras, we would be explaining the view of self-arising, self-knowing wisdom. Of the three, what we have been discussing here is the second of those, reality at the level of the is-ness of phenomena.

You need to come to the view of emptiness. Not only do you need to come to that view but you need great certainty of that view. Therefore the path you have to follow is one of analysing, analysing, and analysing until you have examined every single phenomenon right down to it being nothingness. You analyse everything right down like this, going down even past atoms, and find that there is nothing there at all either in the external world of external phenomena or the internal world of mind. At that point, you have come to the authentic view of emptiness exactly as it is described in the sutras of the Great Vehicle.

When you get to that view of emptiness, you just stay there with that. You set your mind right on that emptiness, and stay there. You let your mind abide on that, without changing it.

²⁹ Skt, dharmatā meaning in general the inner reality of the thing being referred to.

That is the meditation and you practise it for a very, very long time.

This is the way of the sutras. This way has none of the special methods of the development and completion stages of tantra, which summed up are that you visualize yourself as a deity and then recognise the essence of your own mind while doing that. In the sutra system, you just have to stay for a very long time in that unified shamatha-vipashyana on emptiness.

The subject of emptiness is something that The Buddha has spoken of throughout both sutra and tantra. The practice of emptiness does lead you to buddhahood. This is not just another story. It is very real. Anybody who really comes to emptiness, will be able to achieve buddhahood. From The Buddha himself, who perceived emptiness, right up to the present time, there is a continuity of people who have, just like The Buddha did, come to a direct perception of emptiness and gone onto enlightenment. Hundreds, thousands, of meditators in Tibet went to enlightenment and all of them did it on the basis of direct perception of emptiness.

The Buddha himself understood emptiness. Your guru is the manifestation of The Buddha who tells you about emptiness. You could apply yourself to the analysis needed and also find emptiness. You have to do it yourself; no-one else can do it for you. You have to do it yourself; it is the only way.

SUTRA VERSUS TANTRA

All The Buddha's teachings of dharma are included in the two sets of teachings, sutra and tantra. Here, I will highlight the similarities and differences and between sutra and tantra.

In the Greater Vehicle, there are two journeys to the enlightenment of a fully complete buddha and these correspond to the two approaches in the Greater Vehicle that were mentioned earlier—the sutras and tantras. The sutra or causal vehicle journey goes to enlightenment through the practice of the paramitas and takes three countless great eons. The tantra or fruition vehicle journey goes to the level of a buddha through the practice of directly recognizing the essence of one's own mind and takes as little as one lifetime to complete.

In the Greater Vehicle, it is said that the view, emptiness, is shared equally by both sutra and tantra and that there is no difference in the view of emptiness between the two. There is, however, a difference in the way that the practitioner comes to the realization of that view, emptiness. In other words, the view is the same but there is a difference in the path. The methods used in the sutra vehicle to realize the view are differ-

ent from those in tantra. The differences in method result in the differences in speed of attainment mentioned above.

There is no difference in the actual view of emptiness between sutra and tantra. However, there is a difference in how distinctly it is shown. Sutra and tantra both show it correctly but the presentation in sutra is said to be less obvious than the one in tantra. The presentation in tantra is said to be the most complete and most direct presentation of emptiness of any of the Buddhist teachings.

Another distinction that is drawn between sutra and tantra is that tantra has many special methods that sutra does not. Tantra has the methods of development and completion stages but sutra does not have these fruition-style methods at all. In the development stage of tantra, your impure body, speech, mind, and surrounding world is transformed into the pure body, speech, and mind of the deity and its mandala, allowing you to immediately attain the four kayas of a buddha. There are a couple of visualization methods mentioned in sutra, for instance visualizing Shakyamuni Buddha or the bodhisattvas before you and supplicating them for assistance. However, the visualization methods that belong to development stage of tantra, which are the specialized techniques of a deity and its mandala, are not present in sutra at all. Then, in the completion stage of tantra, there are the special techniques for knowing the essence of your own mind through recognizing it for what it is, which is that it is the three kayas already complete. Those techniques for recognizing the view of unified emptiness-appearance do not exist at all in sutra.

There is one argument that happens when discussing the differences of sutra and tantra and the point of special techniques. In general, it is said that sutra does not have the ritual of empowerment, a ritual which is crucial to the tantric system.

However, there is one empowerment mentioned in the Mahayana sutras. Just prior to becoming a buddha, all The Buddhas-to-be go to sit under the bodhi tree. However, before The Buddha-to-be can make the final leap into total omniscience, it is necessary for him to receive a special empowerment from all the tathagathas. It is the receipt of that empowerment that allows The Buddha-to-be to become a true buddha. In the case of Shakyamuni Buddha, he had gone to sit under the bodhi tree and during the night went through the process of conquering the maras. That went on till a little after midnight. Having defeated the maras, then, just at the first rays of the dawn, he received this particular empowerment from all the other tathagatas. Upon receipt of that, he became a fully enlightened buddha.

The emptiness portion of the view of reality is exactly the same in both systems, even if it is presented more directly in tantra. However, the whole point of tantra is that it has especially effective and rapid techniques for realizing the view of reality which sutra does not. These various techniques are summed up in what are called the “two stages” of the tantric vehicle, as has just been described. Because the tantric vehicle is so effective, the journey a practitioner takes on it can go very quickly compared to that with sutra and because of that, the two are sometimes called the quick path and the long path.

PART IV

THE GREAT COMPLETION

MIND IS NOT PRODUCED

The system of Great Completion teachings has a few, special preliminaries. In this chapter, I will describe one that is similar to the sutra-style determinations of emptiness that we have already done. It is an investigation into mind in particular which is done by asking the questions, “Does mind come from somewhere to start with? Does it stay somewhere in the interim? Does it go somewhere at the end?” Using it, you can come to a very precise determination of mind and its emptiness.

The examination has three parts: seeing whether there is a place that mind comes from; seeing whether there is a place that it stays after it has arisen; and seeing whether there is a place that it goes to when it ends.

To start the process, you need to examine like this: when you think something, does the mind that arises in that process of thinking come from the side of the object being thought of or does it come from the side of the mind doing the thinking? Actually, it comes from both because there is no dharma

that arises without arising in dependence on an object and subject³⁰. Nonetheless, let us look into the object first.

The external world, which is comprised of all the phenomena that are not mind, is the source from which all perceptions arise. Where do the phenomena come from? A school teacher in the West would say that they are made up of the hundred and eight elements but our Buddhist system, following the sciences of ancient India, says that they come from the five elements. Thus, the perceptions of mind come from the external objects and those external objects are made up from the five elements. Therefore, we need to examine to find out whether or not those five elements exist or do not exist.

The fifth element in the ancient Indian system is called “space”. Note that the one Indian word “akasha” means both the blue sky up above and also a nothingness which is space. The element of space is the nothingness which is space. It is a totally vast, open nothingness that allows anything to be within it. It has no material substance to it at all. It is different from “outer space” space that Westerners think of; that kind of space has atoms in it, it is still compounded. This kind of space is not compounded. It is really what Westerners would call abstract space.

The other four elements are, in order, earth, water, fire, and wind. Unlike space, these are compounded phenomena. In the ancient Indian system, these four elements were supposedly made of minute atoms that had a specific quality. An earth element atom is an atom that has the particular quality of solidity, which is the hallmark of earth. Similarly, water element atoms have the quality of fluidity, fire element atoms

³⁰ Object here means the object of a consciousness and subject means the consciousness that apprehends that object.

have the quality of heat, and air element atoms have the quality of movement. If you apply the reasoning that dissects something into its smallest parts to each of these atoms and analyse them on the basis of direction, then you would find that there is no such thing as those atoms; they do not exist³¹.

In that way, we have proven that the five external elements do not come into being in a truly existent way. Rather, they come about in mutual relationship with other things. Therefore, they are empty. Thus, the world external to our bodies is not truly produced³², it is produced in a mutual relationship which means that it is empty.

The world that is internal to our bodies is the same way, too. Why? Again, using the reasoning that we have been using up till now: there is this body which appears to rational mind as a lump but which, if you look into the actual thing, is made of atoms. And, if you look into those atoms, you don't find anything there. So the body, too, is not produced.

Then, if there is no body, there cannot be speech. If the body is not produced, then speech also cannot be something that is produced.

In that way, we have gone through the entire physical world and have found that there is nothing there.

³¹ Translator's comment: you could just as well do this using the elements—hydrogen and so forth—of Western science. The result would be the same.

³² Produced means in this context that which comes about, arises, is born in a way that makes it truly existent. It is like "exists" in the four extremes; it means a solid kind of phenomenon that exists like concept sees it.

Then looking specifically at mind, is mind something which is produced to start with? Mind comes because of the external objects. However, through analysis we have shown that there are no produced, external objects. Therefore, our analysis shows that there is no cause for mind to be a produced thing because there is no produced object as the cause of its production. There is no mind produced. It is unproduced or unborn. Anything which is produced also has to end, has to cease. However, if there is nothing produced, then there will be nothing that ceases. That means that mind also does not cease. That leaves the interim possibility. For mind, the interim possibility is the mind of the present. However, if you look into it, as we have done before, even the present mind does not exist.

Despite mind not being produced, not ceasing, and not dwelling as something in the interim, it still seems to be there. Therefore, I am saying to you now, "Look into your mind and examine it well." How is mind? Does it have the nature of earth, water, fire, wind, or space? Does it have the nature of solidity? Does it have the nature of wetness? Does it have the nature of heating? Does it have the nature of movement? Does it have the nature of open space, sheer nothingness? Just how is mind?

Is mind a male kind of a thing? Is mind a female kind of a thing? How is it? Is it like a Tibetan? Is it like an American? Is it like a Chinese? Maybe it is more like a ghost? Or maybe it is more like a god? Is it one of those? No. So let us look a little further.

Take your mind. Is it something that has colour to it? Is it something that has shape to it? Does it have shape? Is it a squarish kind of a thing? Is it a lump? Is it globular? Maybe it is very long? Or perhaps it is very short? Maybe

it is sort of low or maybe it is quite high? Maybe it is really heavy? Maybe it is very light? Maybe it is white? Maybe it is yellow? Maybe it is red? Maybe it is green? Have a look. How is it?

Look further. Is it something that you can see with your eyes, something you can hear with your ears, something you can smell with your nose, something you can taste with your tongue, something you can grab hold of with your hand? Is it one of those? It is not there at all, is it?

Present-day scientists have to say that mind is something that cannot be seen. They could not possibly say that they can find it. Why? Because even The Buddha himself could not see it. He said that it is there but you cannot find it. It is definitely not nothingness for it is the base of the whole cyclic existence.

In that way, no matter how much you search, you can never find mind. Mind is something that you cannot find. Physical matter also is something that you cannot find. So you see, there is nothing there at all, and yet, while there is nothing at all being there, there is something that you start to think about! Nothing there at all and yet your hand grabs it! Maybe it makes your hand hurt when you grab nothing there at all!

Mind is not born. It is unborn. This is just another way of saying that it is not produced. When you know that it is not born, unborn, not produced, then you also know that it does not stop, does not cease, does not have a cessation to it. If it is that way, then in the interim, it must be that it also does not stay put anywhere, isn't that so? For example, if somebody does not get born, then you cannot say that they died. In exactly that way, you should come to a determination of emptiness of the mind. In other words, you should nail down the

fact of the emptiness of mind in the particular sense that mind does not have a place that it came from, does not have a place that it goes to, and therefore does not have a place where it dwells in the interim. Now if that is how it is, then where is mind? It isn't!

The way that I want you to meditate is to do that kind of analysis, and having found that mind is not there, just stay right there with that understanding. Then with that understanding, when some discursiveness arises and takes you away from it, again apply yourself to it and come back to it, and put yourself on that understanding again.

A study of how it is done in sutra and how it is done in tantra, as mentioned in the last chapter, can be very extensive because of the many details involved. However, a meditator does not need to know all of those details. All a meditator needs to know is whatever is required to actually be able to do the meditation. Take the example of medicine. You have doctor scientists who really know all about medicines. They know how to create them, where to extract the ingredients from, and all the details of how these medicines affect the human body. However, if you are a sick person, you do not need to know all of that; all you need to do is take the medicine.

Talking this way also raises the issue of the two styles of meditation: resting meditation and analytical meditation. Analytical meditation is the style of the pandit, the scholar, the very smart person, the person who wants to know about things and get involved in reasonings. Therefore it is also called "Pandit's Meditation". Resting meditation is the style in which you just put your mind on reality, without any logical analysis. A person who follows this path is one who does not involve himself with much except for meditation and the bare

needs of life. In Buddhist practice in ancient India, this kind of person was called “kusulu” meaning a person who eats, sleeps, and excretes. Therefore, resting meditation is also called “Kusulu’s meditation”. The general preliminaries to Great Completion like meditation on emptiness and the specific preliminaries like the examination of mind shown here are in the pandit style of meditation. The actual practice of Great Completion is more the kusulu style.

MIND IS THE ROOT OF ALL

Part of the practice of the Great Completion is to come to a clear intellectual understanding of mind and how it is the root of all possibilities of samsara and nirvāṇa.

I. The Totality of Being

If you look at our human situation, you find that it is entirely composed of three gateways through which we relate to our world: body, speech, and mind. That is the totality of our being.

a. Body

What is body? Body is the physical heap that you have. Remember my earlier comment that the word body in Tibetan means “something which is dispensable, which gets discarded”.

The body that we have at any time is just one of a progression of bodies each of which is discarded as we progress onto the next. In this life, we die. Then there is the discarded body of this life. After that, in the bardo, a bardo body is produced. While we are in the bardo, our future father and mother have coitus and there is conception. At conception, the red blood

element of the mother and the white seed element of the father join together and small substance appears. Then that slowly turns into a yoghurt-like mass. That develops and grows. There is birth and a baby is born. From a baby comes a child. From a child comes a slightly bigger child. That goes on to an adolescent and young adult. Then it goes on to middle age. Then it goes on to old age. That is one whole cycle for a human body. Then one day the current body dies and it now fits with its name, something tossed away at death.

b. Speech

What is speech? The baby mentioned above was born. At some point it had the thought that it would like to speak. In the baby's subtle body are many channels and in those are naturally-occurring letters. When the concept, "I want to talk", arises in the child's mind, it causes a slight wind to occur in those channels. That movement of wind causes these naturally-occurring letters to move and that creates the possibility of speech for the baby.

c. Mind

What is mind? Mind is that thing which can think things. Actually we have a lot of words in the Buddhist tradition for mind. In Buddhist literature, when mind is discussed in general, usually the three Sanskrit words *chitta*, *manas*, and *vijnana* are mentioned³³. This is a little bit of a problem because there are not enough words in English to cover each of the specific Buddhist terms for mind, each with its specific meaning. The following will help to explain them.

Chitta is a general term for the whole complex of dualistic mind, the whole complex of mind that has come out of igno-

³³ Tib. *sems*, *yid*, and *rnam shes* respectively

rance. In this book it is always translated as “mind” or “dualistic mind”. That is an important point. The word mind is not used loosely in Sanskrit or Tibetan, and in this book it is the same. When you see the word “mind” you know that it is referring to chitta.

Manas is a general term for the dualistic mind, like chitta. However, where chitta means the whole, functioning complex of dualistic mind, manas just means, “the thinking dualistic mind”. It is the mentation aspect of dualistic mind. It is the dualistic mind as it goes about its business thinking in concepts.

Vijnana is consciousness in particular. Consciousness, in our Buddhist system, is that which has a direct knowledge of the object of the sense to which the consciousness is connected. For example, an eye consciousness is a simple, direct knowledge of the objects of the eye sense. Using the terminology that we discussed in the section on shamatha meditation on page 112, consciousness is that which knows the superficies of its particular sense. The object of the sense comes in through the sense, then its sense faculty, and immediately it is known exactly for what it is, without being mixed up for something else. The particular appearance that occurs to the sense consciousness is the superfice of the object. For example, the eye consciousness knows the superficies of the eye. Consciousness is one of the many parts of the complex bag of dualistic mind called chitta.

2. Mind Rules

Out of those three things of body, speech, and mind, which one is principal, which rules over the other two? The one that rules is mind. For example, if you wanted to go somewhere, it would be mind that would get you there. If you did not have

a mind, you would be a vegetable. Nothing would happen. You could not do anything.

3. Mind is Behind All of Samsara and Nirvana

Mind really is principal. It really is the one that drives you through cyclic existence. The opposite of cyclic existence is nirvana. If you go to nirvana, it is also the one responsible for that.

Think about all the possibilities of cyclic existence as it is called. All of those possibilities do depend on mind. They do come principally because of mind. How does that happen?

Mindness³⁴, the very essence of mind, is perfectly clear and pure. It is clear in that nothing obstructs its knowing; it just knows whatever presents itself. Mind in itself is purely mind; it is just mind without any other substance mixed in and does not have any impurity inside it. For example, it is like clear, pure water. Water is clear, so that anything can be seen through it without the water getting in the way. Also, it is there but is hard to see because it has no colouration of its own. Water itself is purely water and has no other substances or impurities in it.

Mindness is perfectly clear and pure but it can appear to change because of impurities that come into it. Dualistic mind

³⁴ However, mind also has a core that is not ignorant of reality. This core has many names: a few used in this book are “mindness”, “essence of mind”, “nature of mind”, and so on. Mindness is the working basis of the tantric path. Its very existence is the reason it is possible to shed the excess baggage of mind and return to wisdom which is the type of mind that buddhas have and which is mindness in its purest form.

and all of its paraphernalia cause the essence of mind to have a colouration. Mind itself becomes discoloured by dualistic mind's paraphernalia but it is a key point that mind itself does not change when these impurities of dualistic mind become present. The impurities remain as superficial stains on the mind itself. Therefore, the impurities can be removed, leaving mind itself in all of its purity.

An example for this is water. Water itself is clear and has no colour to it but drop in a drop of white impurity, and the colour of the water turns white; drop in a drop of red impurity and the colour of the water turns red; drop in a drop of black impurity and the colour of the water turns black. This colouration added to the water appears over and covers the innate pure and clear quality of the water but does not alter the innate quality of the water. Therefore, you can put water that has dis-colouration or some other contamination in it through a water purifier and get out clean water. That would not be possible if the substances in the water had reacted with the water and become part of the actual entity of water.

Another example is a crystal ball. Take a crystal ball which is transparent and clear and put a red cloth to one side. Suddenly you see the crystal ball as being red. Put a green cloth over it. Suddenly you see the crystal ball as being green. The colour of the ball appears to have changed but in fact, the crystal ball itself has not changed.

Mindness is clear, meaning that there is nothing within it that obstructs it. However, when ignorance happens to it, a whole complex of dualistic mind appears on its surface and dis-colours. At that time the essence of the dualistic mind remains perfectly clear but now it has all the consciousnesses, mentation, afflictions, sense impressions, and so on that go with the process of dualistic knowing sitting on top of it and

these alter its appearance, making it look different, just like water that has been dis-coloured or a crystal ball that has had colours held near it.

Dualistic mind is controlled and pulled around by the external objects that its consciousnesses perceive. If the external object is something that you do not like, then mind produces anger towards it. If the external object is something that is desirable, then mind produces desire towards that. If the external object is something that you have no special feeling for one way or the other, then mind produces a deluded state towards that, not paying attention to it. Thus the various afflictions—passion, aggression, ignorance, pride, jealousy, and so on—arise as a reaction to the consciousness having its superficialities. That provides the driving force that causes us to cycle around in the unsatisfactoriness of cyclic existence.

In that way, starting from mindness, which is pure knowing, there is a whole process that results in mind and, because of it, the entirety of the three realms of cyclic existence. In other words, all of cyclic existence starts from mind but not just that, it starts from the fundamentally pure essence of mind.

The other side of cyclic existence is the peace of nirvana, the absence of unsatisfactoriness. Once you have fallen into cyclic existence, you have to make the journey back to peace and that also depends on mind. In the case of the Lesser Vehicle, you make your journey by relying on an elder, a sthavira. You look into the view which is the lack of a personal self and, by practising that, come to the level of an arhat, and thereby obtain emancipation for yourself. In the Greater Vehicle, you make your journey by relying on a spiritual friend, a kalyanamitra. You look into the view, which is the emptiness of self and other as expressed in the Prajnaparamita, you do the practice the six paramitas of a bodhisatva, and thereby

obtain the level of a fully complete buddha, which fulfills both your own and others' aims for emancipation. In the Vajra Vehicle, you make your journey by relying on a guru. You do the development stage practices of the deity and the completion stage practices in which you look into the view of the actuality of mind. In all of those journeys, the whole thing still depends on mind.

In that way, everything in both cyclic existence on the one side and nirvana on the other side and the journey between them depends on mind.

That is the reasoning that shows that mind in general is the principal thing. It also shows the relationship between mindness, the essence of mind, and mind. It also shows how we fall into cyclic existence because of ignorance occurring in the essence of mind and how we journey back out to the peace of nirvana by undoing the ignorance and returning to the purity of mindness, as it actually is.

This is actually an exercise in developing prajna that is needed for the practice of the Great Completion. This, as with some other explanations that I gave earlier, has been exactly to the point of getting you to cognize the fact that mind is the root of everything. This body—the appearance of this body—and the external world—all of the appearances of the external world whatever they may be—all is made by mind.

I want you to consider this carefully. Apply your prajna to it and come to a certainty, a definite determination, that mind really is the root of everything!

INTRODUCTION TO RIGPA

I. The Vehicle of Great Completion Subsumes All Other Vehicles

The entirety of The Buddha's dharma can be summed up into two, three, or nine progressively higher vehicles. The path or vehicle of the Great Completion subsumes all of the views and practices of all of the vehicles below it. The practice of refuge that we discussed as a preliminary to the Great Completion belongs to the Lesser Vehicle. Similarly, the practices of the Four Mind Reversers belong, for the most part, to the Lesser Vehicle. The view of things being impermanent, of things being multiplicities, and being dependent is also from the Lesser Vehicle. The practice of arousing the mind, that is to say of arousing enlightenment mind, belongs to the sutra section of the Greater Vehicle. The view of emptiness in which the true existence of phenomena has been cut off also belongs to the sutra section of the Greater Vehicle. All of these, which we have discussed as preliminaries to Great Completion, are thus included within the path of Great Completion. On top of that, the practices of the lower vehicles of

tantra, which can be summed up as development stage and completion stage with signs, are also contained in Great Completion.

Just like each of us is a complete human being with legs, arms, and everything else needed to make up the whole, so Great Completion is one complete thing that contains all of the various parts necessary to it being complete. Thus, this Great Completion is like a giant treasury containing everything of the dharma within. When you get to the practice of Great Completion, it is like being at the peak of a mountain from which you are looking down into the valleys below that are still part of the mountain and which contain all of the various other practices of the lower vehicles.

2. The Practice of the Lower Vehicles Is to Tame Mind

Now, if we try to pinpoint what it is that is behind our wandering around in samsara, what would it be? It is exactly mind. Likewise, if we try to pinpoint what it is that would give us release from that samsara, what would it be? It is, again, exactly mind.

The path of release that we have discussed here starts with the Four Mind Reversers. The practice of them is connected with mind. In it, you use your mind, which is the knower, to look into objects, which are the things known.

The Four Mind Reversers propel you into taking refuge. When you take refuge, you are using mind, again, and you are using it in reference to an object, again. In it, you have a mind of taking refuge and the object mind is involved with is the Three Jewels.

After taking refuge, you arouse the enlightenment mind. When you do so, you are using mind, again, and you are using

it in reference to an object, again. In it, you have a mind that is generating compassion and the object mind is involved with is all sentient beings.

The sutra approach to reality is done through the practices of both shamatha and vipashyana. The practice of shamatha is the practice of letting the mind self-settle. In letting the mind self settle, what is doing the self-settling? Again, it is mind. In the practice of vipashyana according to the Greater Vehicle, you do the practice of arriving at emptiness. When you do so, you are using mind, again, and you are using it in reference to an object, again. In it, you have a mind that is perceiving emptiness and the object it is involved with is dharmadhatu³⁵.

After that, you arrive at the lower tantric vehicle with the practices of development and completion stage. When you do these practices, you are using mind, again, and you are using it in reference to an object, which is the mandalas of pure body, speech, and mind.

If you look through that description of the practices done so far, you will see that all of your meditations are involved with mind. At all steps on the way so far, what you have had to do, basically speaking, is to tame mind. Whether the mind involved is good mind or bad mind, it is to be tamed.

What is a bad mind? There are many types of bad mind. Essentially, they are all the kinds of mind that keep you in cyclic existence and keep you from journeying down the path. For example, you might have a mind with a wrong view such

³⁵ In this case, dharmadhatu does not mean the realm of all dharmas, it means the empty sphere which is the nature of reality of all dharmas.

as one that believes there are no future lives, there is no karma, there is no cause and effect. If you do, then, following the system laid out above, you have to tame it. How do you do that? You bring along a good mind (which in the case mentioned would be a mind which does understand past and future lives, a mind which does understand karma, or a mind which does have a correct view of cause and effect) and apply it as an antidote to the bad mind with whatever wrong view that it has. In that way the wrong views of the not-so-good mind are tamed and the mind turns to a good mind.

Another kind of bad mind that anyone in cyclic existence can have is a mind which is concerned only with one's self, a very selfish kind of mind. That mind would be tamed by the application of a good mind, which in this case would be enlightenment mind.

The root of all bad minds is the mind of the basic ignorance that grasps at a self in persons and phenomena as being really true. What is the good mind that you would apply to that in order to tame it? According to the ways of the Lesser Vehicle, you would apply the good mind that has a correct understanding of impermanence, multiplicity, and dependence to the bad mind of grasping at a personal self as true. In the sutra approach of the Greater Vehicle, you would understand that the grasping at a self either in a person or phenomena was a mistaken mind and to tame that mind, you would apply the good mind perceiving emptiness.

3. The Practice Is to Bypass Mind and Go to Wisdom

In that way, the journey to enlightenment in the vehicles below the Great Completion is always one in which you tame the mind, meaning dualistic mind. However, there is a problem with this approach ultimately speaking, because, no matter

how good a mind you develop, that mind is never going to be able to meet with primordial reality. Therefore, the vehicle of Great Completion takes a different approach from all the vehicles below it. The Great Completion does not try to work with “mind” but goes instead directly to the heart of enlightenment. It uses the core of dualistic “mind”, which is enlightened mind itself, and brings that out directly. This core of dualistic mind, which is the wisdom of a buddha, is given many names. One name for it is mindness, another is self-arising, self-knowing wisdom. For a practitioner on the path of Great Completion, it is given the very special name “rigpa”³⁶.

³⁶ Sanskrit vidya, Tib. rig pa. One of the most important terms of Buddhism and especially of the tantras, it is often translated as “awareness” these days but that fails to convey the meaning. The Sanskrit, which becomes the root of English words like “video”, “vision”, and the like, implies an active knowing, in which things are clearly seen. It has a sense of “sight of”, “the seeing of”, and in some cases “insight into”.

In Sanskrit and Tibetan it has both noun and verb forms and both are frequently used. Unfortunately the verb usage has been lost on translators and it is usually translated as a noun, often with loss of key meaning. For example, the “ignorance” we usually speak of in English when talking about Buddhist view actually means “not rig-ing”; it is a loss of sight, failure to see reality—and that meaning is very evident in Sanskrit and Tibetan. The opposite of ignorance is “to rig” the reality, in which case one is either reversing out of loss of sight of reality or has gained full insight into it, and has become a buddha.

As Gampopa says, there are only two sides to existence. The side of those who have sight of reality—that is, the side in which there is “rigging” of reality or there is possession of rigpa of the reality—and the side of those who do not have sight of reality—that is, the

(continued...)

Thus, there is a special distinction made in the teachings of Great Completion. In the Great Completion, there is “mind” meaning the dualistic mind of samsaric existence and there is “rigpa” which is the immediate experience of the non-dualistic enlightenment mind. If taming mind is taken as the path, which is the approach of the lower vehicles, it takes a very long time to get to the wisdom mind of a buddha. However, if rigpa is taken as the path, which is the practice of the peak vehicle of Great Completion, then the journey out of cyclic existence to enlightenment will be extremely rapid because the practitioner is practising the enlightenment mind itself.

Earlier in the book in the section on karma, on page 43, I went to some trouble to explain what mind is. For example, I was talking about mind as a beginningless continuity and defined it as that which “registers and comprehends”. That is what mind is. However, that mind, which is the mind that sentient beings in general have, is just their fictional truth.

³⁶(...continued)

side in which there is “no rigging” of reality or there is possession of “not having rigpa”.

This rigpa, which is direct sight and knowledge of something, is an exceptionally important term and does not have an adequate English equivalent. Therefore, I am sticking my neck out and using the Tibetan term both as a noun (rigpa) and as a verb (to rig). Sanskrit usually works better than Tibetan for English audiences because Sanskrit has more ties with English. However, “rigpa” and “to rig” seem easier than variations on the Sanskrit “vid-” at the moment. Let us see what happens. Whatever else happens, we have to come up with a unique term in English for this term of terms in Buddhist thought. The word “awareness” that is so often used as the translation for rigpa is totally inadequate.

The very core of that fictional truth is the superfactual truth, the actuality of mind altogether. That core is where buddhahood lies. In the sutras, that core is called tathagatagarbha, the potential for attaining buddhahood. In the tantras, you are introduced to that core of mind not through the concept of a potential that you have and could later attain buddhahood through but as the direct experience of your innate buddhahood. When you are introduced to it in this way by a qualified guru and gain some recognition of it, what you do see of it through that recognition is called “rigpa”.

An example often given of rigpa and mind is the sun and the rays of the sun. The sun is like rigpa and the rays which come off it are like mind. Another example often used is an ocean and its waves. The ocean is like rigpa and the waves on its surface are like mind. Another example is the sky and clouds. The sky is like rigpa and the clouds, which appear on it and cover it over, are like mind.

4. How Great Completion Goes to Wisdom

All of the practices discussed so far that lead up to practice of Great Completion have been practices involved with taming mind. In them, we have been taking the mind we have and using it to think about something. We use our mind to consider something, come to a decision about it that we see as correct, and in the end meditate on that conclusion so that it becomes part of our being. That is a very good method. Why? Because our self-knowing wisdom has been bound up for a long, long time by all sorts of wrong minds that have not been in accord with wisdom. By using these various methods, we might not be working directly on the wisdom itself but we are working on the wrappings around the wisdom. To say it more directly, the core of our minds which is self-knowing wisdom

has been wrapped in layers of mind—good, bad, and otherwise—for a very long time. By working on the wrappings and making them less thick and tight, we do take steps towards being able to un-wrap the self-knowing wisdom. Thus, all of the methods of taming the mind are very, very important. They are the effort that we make towards opening up the wrappings around wisdom. Nearly everyone who sets out on the path has to start out by taming the “mind” wrappings using the mind. There are a very few people who can, without doing any of the “mind” practices first, practise rigpa directly and come to a direct cognition of self-knowing wisdom.

Well then, what do we have to do in order to meet with our origin, our mindness, the self-knowing wisdom which is our original state? According to the style of Great Completion we do nothing! Up to now, we have done this and we have done that; we have made all sorts of efforts. However, all of those efforts and activities have resulted in nothing but making more mind and hence have resulted in more wandering around in cyclic existence. If working and working, doing and doing, continually doing this and that and the other, could lead us to the attainment of buddhahood, then, because that is all we have been doing for countless lifetimes, we would have already attained it!

From beginningless time we have been busy, busy, engaged, working hard in cyclic existence. That is what we have been doing. But that is not reality. Reality is the actuality—the actual situation as it really is—of your own mind. This reality has no doing in it because there is no mind-based activity. This reality is an extremely pure thing, completely free of all foreign matter. Right from the very beginning, it has been buddha. This very special thing is something that is in you. It is your nature.

Not recognizing that nature—not knowing that that was your nature and instead being involved in this and that—you have wandered around in cyclic existence. Now, in order to exit cyclic existence, this primordial nature that we have needs to be brought forth. What practice of meditation has to be done to bring that forth?

If what we are trying to get back to did have to be made freshly using some creative process of meditation, and if we did go about producing it and making it, would that be of any real benefit? No, it would not, because, being created by mind, it would come to an end, sooner or later. The thing that we are trying to get to has been residing within us since time without beginning. Thus, there is nothing to be freshly produced. The whole practice is simply to allow what is already there to come forth. What we are trying to get to is completely beyond ordinary types of activity; beyond anything to be done. Therefore, the whole practice is one of letting body, speech, and mind rest evenly, in reality, just as it is.

5. Letting Body, Speech, and Mind Settle into Reality, As It Is

The body is just set straight. In general, this means using the postures of the Seven Dharmas of Vairocana, though the eyes should be looking out directly, rather than down. It is equally fine to put your hands on your knees instead of using the equipoise mudra or to use the equipoise mudra. If you do use the equipoise mudra, then men should put their right hands on top, women should put their left hands on top.

Speech and breath are intimately connected so, what about breath? You let your breath come and go, and specifically, you let it come and go through a slightly-opened mouth. There is a reason for this. It is because the breath is connected

with the subtle winds and the movement of the subtle winds can trigger discursive thought and through that you end up just wandering again in cyclic existence. The normal pathway for the breath is through the nostrils. If you do not use the nose but use the mouth instead, then to a certain extent, the subtle winds will not move in their normal patterns and that means that the breath will tend not to trigger discursive thoughts. By breathing through the mouth, as opposed to the nose, you reduce and can even eliminate the movements of dualistic mind. For that reason, in this practice, you open the mouth slightly and let the breath come and go through the mouth. The instruction is to breathe completely, both inhalation and exhalation, through the mouth.

In the instructions on the Seven Dharmas of Vairocana, it also mentions resting the tip of the tongue against the palate, which helps to reduce the flow of saliva. In this instruction, firstly, just the tip of the tongue touches the palate, and secondly, it is not joined to it very strongly, it is just resting there. In this case, if you don't do it, it doesn't matter. The instruction here is to let things be in its own character, which means to be rested of their own accord. Therefore, if you do join the two, it is all right and if not, that is all right, too.

The way that you place the mind is quite similar to the instructions I gave for shamatha practice in which I said to stay right in the mind of the present. To do that, in general, you do not involve yourself in the past, do not involve yourself in the future, but stay right in the present. And then, in particular, you stay right there, unaltered. The example for how to let the mind settle is that of a puddle of water. If you get a stick and stir up the water in a puddle, the mud at the bottom gets stirred up into the water and the water remains unclear. However, if you just leave the water alone, then the mud

clouding the water gradually settles and the water becomes completely clear. It is likewise for mind. Therefore, there is nothing that you need to change in mind. There is nothing that you need to fix in the mind. There is nothing that you need to hold onto in the mind. There is nothing that you need to stop in the mind. There is nothing that you need to produce in the mind. You just leave it as it is.

6. Introduction to Rigpa

What happens when you leave your mind just like that? Do you have a sort of easy, very clear, slightly empty—empty in the sense of sediment or junk not there—experience? Then the next question is: does that come straight away or does it come in a process?

When you take that settled mind and look into it—and we are talking about looking into it in terms of finding rigpa—it is such that, if you look into it without stopping the knower, experience does continue.

In doing this meditation and looking into the mind which is settled, it is not that you cut off the knower. In fact there is a knower there and that knower is wide awake. The example of how it is wide awake is that of a particular bird which, having been born, pokes its head out of the nest, and knows everything very clearly; it is new born but it is wide awake at the same time. The other example is that of pulling a hat off your head. When you do this practice, the kind of knower that you need with it is that kind of knower.

Let's assume that you have had that kind of experience. Now consider that kind of knower; how is it? You need to examine it but, unlike in earlier meditations on emptiness, you do not use reasoning here, rather, you just need to come to

a clear and definite decision about what it is. Does this kind of knowing have faith? Does it have devotion? Does it have sacred outlook³⁷? Does it have those three things? Or, does it have non-virtue—passion, aggression, jealousy, pride, and so on? Does it have a sort of non-knowing, slightly thick, non-determinate quality with it, as though you have been banged on the head and you are sort of sick and not fully with it? Just how is it? These are the sorts of questions that you could ask about that experience to be certain of just how it is. These are all questions that help you make the distinction for yourself about whether you have been in mind or in rigpa.

If you have something which is not soiled by either those positive qualities of faith, devotion, and so forth, or those negative qualities of passion, aggression, and so forth, that is not mind, is it? Likewise, if you actually do experience this not-mind, it does not have a non-knowing to it; rather, it has a luminosity factor to it— and please remember that luminosity is a special metaphor for the knowing quality of the essence of mind. This kind of knowing is one that does not have an object *per se*. It is something that is beyond having grasped and grasped³⁸. It is not difficult, so just stay there. Then that is it, you are there with it!

³⁷ Tib. dag snang, which has also been called pure perception in English.

³⁸ Meaning the normal dualistic process of perception in which mind appears both as the object that it appears to it and as the mind apprehending or grasping it. This is a special term of Buddhist systems that set some kind of mind as being the only thing that there really is. You can read more about this in the free publication on the Padma Karpo Translation Committee web-site called “The Three Characters of Mind Only School”.

If you have something that has been tainted by those positive or negative qualities of mind, either one, then that would not be rigpa, it would be mind.

What is the difference between mind and rigpa? From one perspective, it comes down to the fact that mind is something that always involves effort. This particular effort that we are talking about here is a word that means conceptual effort. When you have conceptual effort, it means that things are not spontaneous, that they are not automatic. Rigpa, on the other hand, is a spontaneous, automatic situation. It does not have any kind of conceptual effort associated with it. Faith, devotion, and so on are usually involved with conceptual effort and hence are factors of mind. However, it is possible for those things to shine forth as the qualities of rigpa. If they did, they would shine forth as spontaneous presence in the rigpa, not as something that was produced through conceptual effort in the context of mind. You could have it either way, and the way that you would know how it was is by deciding on the nature of the knower that was going with them. The knower would either be mindness which is rigpa or mind which is dualistic.

The thing called mind requires an object. If there is no object, mind cannot go about its business. The knower called rigpa does not need an object. It is just naturally what it is, so needs nothing extra to know. Of the two, on mind's side, when there is an unpleasant object, mind gets unhappy and angry about it and when there is a pleasant object, mind likes that and gets happy about it.

Well, if there is no pleasant or unpleasant object at all, then what will mind do? This raises a question in terms of the rigpa to which you have just been introduced. Is it possible to have a knowing that occurs even though there is no pleasant or

unpleasant object? If you do not have an unpleasant object, is it possible for mind to give rise to anger? When you have recognized rigpa, it is possible, without the presence of a normal, dualistic object, for the knower to give rise to energy which is like anger but without the dualistic clinging. The energy that appears is the liveliness of rigpa and there is nothing very special about that.

What is this essence of mind? It is an object-less knowing. Did you find that? When you come across a knower that you think fills the bill, so to speak, you need to look into it a little bit further and see whether or not it has the three qualities of something which is produced: did it come from somewhere; did it stay somewhere; did it go somewhere? If you really did get to rigpa, then it does not have those. Why? Because it is free from all mental elaboration which means that it is beyond production, cessation, and dwelling. It is unborn, in short.

7. The Qualities of Rigpa

Rigpa contains all three kayas of a buddha. Rigpa is the dharmakāya. We say, “There is no buddha other than this”. This means that you find buddha in your own mind. You find it in this kind of knower which is called, in Great Completion, rigpa. Then the luminosity portion of rigpa, which is the actual knowing factor and which continues on without any stoppage within the ongoing emptiness, also is part of rigpa. That is the saṃbhogakāya. The empty and luminosity portions are together, unified. This, in the Great Completion system, is given a special name: it is called “compassionate activity”. This is the nirmāṇakāya. In the Great Completion system, there are two kinds of nirmāṇakāya: the internalized-clarity and the externalized-clarity nirmāṇakāya.

It is necessary to have a complete understanding that rigpa is all of these things. If you do not really understand properly about these things, then it is not possible for a proper meeting with rigpa, an introduction with rigpa to happen. However, when doing rigpa practice, you do not have to think, “Is this rigpa something that is empty or not empty?” You do not have to think, “Is this dharmakāya? Is it nirmāṇakāya? Is it saṃbhogakāya?” You do not need any such thought. You do not need to think anything, in fact.

Who is rigpa? It is you. It is just this now! Rigpa which is great light or something very, very, very profound that you go down deep into or some brilliant, vivid, fantastic experience is not rigpa. Rigpa is just that you let your mind self-settle and then there is a very vivid, knowing quality to the mind. There are a number of experiential words that get to the core of it. Firstly, it is very clear where clear means that it has nothing sullyng it, nothing dirtyng it up. Then additionally it is very brilliant where brilliant does not mean there is light, except as a metaphor as we use in the English language, of illumination of the mind.

Part of the intellectual understanding of rigpa that you do need to have is the distinction between mind and rigpa. In fact, this particular distinction is an extremely important point of understanding. When we say mind, we are talking about something on the side of being associated with a subject and an object. Rigpa, on the other hand, is something that is outside of, beyond the fact of there being a subject and an object.

In the sutra vehicle of characteristics, there is an emptiness that is beyond all mental elaboration. However, even though that kind of profound understanding of the nature of things exists in the sutra vehicle of characteristics, there is no discus-

sion of subjects involving rigpa, such as the recognition of rigpa the three kayas within rigpa, or the distinction between mind and rigpa, in that vehicle.

8. Recognizing Rigpa

In terms of meeting with rigpa, as much as you do it, and as much as you do it without there being any activity, without there being any work, without there being any doing present, that will be fine. Therefore, rest in its own character.

Now, what do you do? First you look hither, “How is my mind?” Nothing to find, is there? Nothing to find, so let it be as it is. This is the three-part demonstration that Tulku Ugyen showed. He used to say, “Look hither, recognize, leave it at that”. For example, you look, “How is my mind?”. At the moment you look, you see it. Then you just leave it as is, without any alteration. In other words, to see the essence of your mind, you just look hither and having done so and recognized it, you just stay right there. Then you will find rigpa which has been there since beginningless time.

How are you now? You are involved with external objects. You are out. Now, look hither, which means to look back in instead of out, and then, having done that and seen it, just leave it. That is how you do it.

Question: “When my eyes are open, I am still perceiving the environment around me, though there is no thought, no elaboration, about it. How does this fit in with your explanation of subject and object? I would like to hear whether my mind is using an object or not. It doesn’t feel like it.

Answer: You have some doubt about this. Look right into the doubter and stay there.

Question: “There are thoughts and then there is an experience like being pulled out of desire and attention and everything is just very clear. Then I start to contract. The openness of it contracts.”

Answer: While you are doing the practice, do you have the kinds of thought, even a subtle ones, of, “Oh yes, it is quite clear. Aha, it is quite open!”? If so, you don’t need to think those. Just stay there without thinking. Whatever happens, happens. That is it. No thinking. Just stay in its own character.

Question: “There is physical pain. I notice that I suddenly want to do something with it to make it disappear. It is not so much aversion as it is going into it, with the intention to dissipate it.”

Answer: The meditator wants to get rid of the meditation like a flea or a louse. Even a great meditator has his meditation disturbed by a little flea. It is the same meaning, because whether there is a flea or not, the body can have all sorts of different disturbing experiences, here, there, and everywhere. Generally speaking, if you have some kind of unpleasantness in the body, whatever it might be, you need to look into the essence of it.

Question: “Is the noticing of the unpleasantness where the glue of clinging is?”

Answer: Yes, exactly. The essence of the clinging is emptiness. You won’t find it if you do go into it. Having not found it, you just stay in its own character in that. The body can have all sorts of unpleasantness happen to it, from minor irritations to great sickness. The whole point is to look right into their essence. The fact of there being pain or not pain is beside the point. The issue is that the pain itself is empty. In other

words, the essence of the pain itself, whether it is clinging to the pain or just the raw pain, is emptiness and if you go into the essence of it, you actually do come to emptiness. And when you arrive at the emptiness which is the essence of that thing, then you just stay there just like that.

That was the oral instruction on the issue of suffering. Pleasant circumstances, all the way from merely pleasant up to great bliss are exactly the same situation. If you look into those things themselves, if you look right into their essence, then you will find that they are none other than emptiness. And in that case, since we are talking about bliss or happiness, it becomes unified bliss and emptiness.

At any rate, to summarize, in doing this practice, you as the practitioners do not need to think one single thing. As you do the practice, you might have thoughts like, “Am I meditating now? Am I actually doing the meditation now? Am I not doing the meditation now? Did I recognize rigpa now? Did I not recognize rigpa now? Maybe I am wandering around in cyclic existence now? Maybe I am not wandering around in cyclic existence now? Maybe I’ll get to buddhahood? Maybe I won’t get to buddhahood? Yes, I am taming my afflictions! Oh no, I am not taming my afflictions! I am going to attain this very profound path! I am not going to attain this very profound path! Oh yes, I understand exactly what rigpa is. Oh no, I don’t understand what rigpa is!” Whatever you have of those various thoughts, you do not need them. Just dispense with them. Just find what is being pointed at by the instructions on recognition then rest in its own character in that. Just that is rigpa. This is it! You do not have to search for anything else. If you go and search for something else, and you find something else, and then you settle yourself on that, that is another story all together, not the rigpa story.

Now if you do get to rigpa by recognizing it and are staying within it, then any kind of rational mind can arise within that state of rigpa and it will not be an issue because rigpa itself provides the space for anything to occur without any need for stopping anything that does arise in that state. Discursive thoughts seen from the right angle are none other than all of the various manifestation bodies³⁹ which are coming from non-stopped compassionate activity.

You can stay in rigpa and can do all the accounting⁴⁰ in the world but I think, honestly speaking, it will be a little bit difficult for you at the beginning. If that is the case, then try to do as much of it as you can in the post-attainment and do as much rigpa practice as you possibly can in your equipoise, that is periods of formal meditation practice.

Question: “When I am in its own character in the rigpa, words like “sacred” do not seem to have much meaning. Does the word “sacred” come as a description of the space of rigpa because it seems so ordinary and natural and so near?”

Answer: You do not need anything special. You do not need any special feeling to come. Words are words for communicating. In the case of rigpa, those words do not need to have any special feeling associated with them. Feelings of the flavour of words is something associated with mind. Rigpa is something which is beyond mind so that kind of stuff is just not going to be there. On the other hand, it is not that rigpa is just a blank kind of experience. Rigpa has everything in it. Rigpa has all the wisdoms and kayas happening in it.

³⁹ Skt. *nirmāṇakāyas*

⁴⁰ Meaning that you can do anything that involves working with items, one by one, as many as there are in the whole world.

Question: “When I do the practice, I do sometimes have thoughts that arise. For example, I hear a truck out in the traffic and I try not to stop it but it is difficult not to stop it and I soon get involved in the thought process.”

Answer: Yes, exactly. That kind of thing is exactly what happens. Why? Because you have just begun doing the practice. For beginners, rigpa only comes in very short spurts. It comes, but it does not stay for very long. You sit up, you look, you see it, you rest in its own character, it stays for a moment, and then you fall back into mind. Then you have to do it all over again. It has been said repeatedly, “Do short sessions many times”, meaning in this case that you do recognize and stay with it for a short while then lose it so you do that over and over again.

Question: “What is the difference between self-occurrence in rigpa and self-occurrence in mind?”

Answer: The essential difference is that, in the case of mind, the proliferation of thought⁴¹ is happening in the context of grasped-grasping⁴². In the case of rigpa, there is none of that dualism; the thought appears as part of the state, with no apprehended and apprehender.

Question: “When I began the practice, I switched from being caught in external things to actually looking inwards at mind. Then there was a kind of a struggle, where the mind wanted to go back out, but I disciplined it and kept it in. Then something arose which felt like clinging with no object, which

⁴¹ This is the terminology for thoughts arising in the context of mind, not of rigpa.

⁴² Meaning the duality of a mind that has the thought of an apprehended appearance and the thought of an apprehender.

I had never experienced before. The impulse to have an object was there but I had stopped connecting to objects. Then all of a sudden this impulse of wanting to have an object came out.”

Answer: You have developed a concept that dwelling or abiding is good. Abiding is talking about mind. The concept you have developed regarding mind is that it would be good if mind were to abide and not move. In other words, it seems that you have developed the concept that movement of mind is bad and abiding is good. However, that is not the point. There is no such thing in what we are talking about as moving mind being bad and abiding mind being good. Both are merely the liveliness, the energetic activity of rigpa. Also, in a more conventional way, moving and staying are just mind.

Question: “I got to the state of being very still and it had all the qualities that you have described for self-knowing wisdom. It was a state of great equanimity. I was very solid and very aware of everything going on around me and nothing could distract me. However, I still had a sense of a knower being present. And I have been thinking that I need to get past that sense of there being a knower?”

Answer: The type of knower that you are describing is a dualistic knower, one with apprehender and apprehended. You do not need that in rigpa because in rigpa there is no dualistic mind.

SUPPLICATION TO THE GURU

In the Vajra Vehicle, supplicating the guru is extremely important. It brings the blessings of the guru and helps your meditation to progress. Therefore, at this point, we are going to do a little supplication. There are many supplication prayers that you could use. In the Great Completion tradition, we usually supplicate Padmasambhava also known as Guru Rinpoche, since he was the founder of the tradition in Tibet.

Guru Rinpoche had the highest possible attainment. He did not die and pass away from this world but entered a body of light that could continue to work for sentient beings in that very body. Thus he is still physically present. One of the special features of Guru Rinpoche is that, because of his own prayers made in earlier times, he is especially capable of helping beings of our time. His capability at this particular time and for us in particular is greater than that of other buddhas. Generally speaking, The Buddhas as a whole have extraordinary capacities in terms of being able to help us sentient beings but for people of this particular time Guru Rinpoche is very important because he does have a capability, it is said, one

hundred times greater than the other buddhas when it comes to being able to help beings of our time and location.

Guru Rinpoche himself said that there is no problem that he cannot eliminate for us with the exception, of course, of a situation where because of karma, it is inevitable that someone has to experience it. This is something I have experienced myself many times. In Tibet, also this kind of thing happened many, many times.

One thing that I know of personally involved a woman who was off in an isolated place, doing retreat. She had left the retreat house and gone to get some water. On her way down the path she came face to face with a tiger in front of her. The tiger was ready to pounce. She was very afraid and immediately supplicated Guru Rinpoche. On opening her eyes, she found that the tiger had become completely pacified. He lay down and curled himself up. She went down, walked around him, and finally returned to her hut.

After the Chinese occupation of Tibet, there was a Tibetan man who was captured by the Chinese, manacled, and taken off to prison where he was told, "You will be executed tomorrow." He was completely afraid, of course, so he got down to supplicating Guru Rinpoche from his heart. As he was doing that, he fell off to sleep. At some point in the night, he woke up. He was quite amazed. There was a kind of a whitish man in front of him who said, "Go, go!" The whitish man opened the door of the cell, did whatever else was necessary, and the man escaped.

Then there is a story about a Gelugpa lama. Monasteries usually have several levels to them and there is usually a top-most room which is usually made out of wood. The lama was staying in that room. There was an earthquake. The whole structure collapsed and the fire that was in the kitchen caught

onto the rest of the wooden structure and the whole thing went up in a blaze. The lama had not died. He was caught in the wood. He made very powerful supplications to Guru Rinpoche and the structure around him, with him in it, lifted up, went across and down from the place where the fire was. He could hear all of the others in the monastery screaming in pain as they died in the fire but he was safe.

Thus, Guru Rinpoche can do amazing things to help. Of course, if there is some previously accumulated karma which has come to the point where it has to ripen, then there is no way around that.

So do your supplication with faith and visualize that Guru Rinpoche is really present before you. It is quite important to have the strong feeling that Guru Rinpoche really is before you and to understand that Guru Rinpoche really is a buddha. You would not want to have any doubt about this. He definitely is a buddha, someone who really has liberated himself from samsara.

RECOGNIZING RIGPA

The Great Completion dharma is the dharma which is at the peak of all other vehicles. It is the peak teaching on returning to reality of all teachings. Where would you find the actuality of the Great Completion dharma? You will find it right within yourself. There is no Great Completion other than that. This is called the difference between the dharma of Great Completion and the person of Great Completion.

The Great Completion that you realize is not the sort of thing that you obtain from someone else such as The Buddha or your guru handing it over to you. It is not like that. If it were like that, it would be really easy to manifest it, wouldn't it?

The Great Completion that you realize is the sort of thing that you get because you yourself realize that it is something that you do have. However, to get it there is one thing necessary, which is that you need to listen to a teacher who will tell you how to get what you do have. And in fact, the real Great Completion is not something that you get even from your guru's mouth. Why? Because the real Great Completion is

beyond words. There is simply no way to put that reality into words, not matter how hard you try.

The usual approach to gaining some knowledge is that a person starts by listening to explanations using words. The person thinks about the meaning until they get it correct. Finally, they go and practise that understanding until they realize it. This whole process, from beginning to end is done with rational mind, that is to say, with a mind that is working in a dualistic framework of this and that. The real Great Completion cannot be realized like that for the simple reason that it cannot be realized through the application or workings of rational mind. The real Great Completion is not an object of a dualistic mode of operation of a rational mind. Therefore, you cannot use the normal processes of hearing, contemplating, and meditating to get to Great Completion.

There is another way to explain this point which is just to say that Great Completion is really easy, meaning that it is something that you do not have to create using the normal processes of rational mind and-or meditation based on rational mind. There is no rational work or effort needed. You do not have to meditate on anything in the usual sense of meditation to cultivate and develop something. Rather, you just allow it to be there and that is it! That is easy, isn't it? Compare this to having to put a sack on your back and carry it around. Then you pull the sack down and you open it up and you have to get everything out of it and put everything together⁴³. That is difficult, isn't it? We do not need that kind of thing here.

There was a teacher in the past who practised hard. He did not, even from the time he was very young, look into books

⁴³ Where the sack is the burden of dualistic mind that you normally would use.

and learning. All he did, from the time he was very young, was to practise meditation. He attained very high realization. His apparent body just changed into a body of light. If he went out during the day, you wouldn't see the shadow of his body. For him, there was no difference in his being from moment to moment; he had attained a changeless state. The teacher's name was Sabdug Rinpoche.

My uncle, Samten Gyatso, went to meet him and requested the introduction to mind. Sabdug Rinpoche said to him, "Drink this tea." Having drunk the tea, Samten Gyatso asked him again for this special instruction. Sabdug Rinpoche said to him, "Okay, no problem, I'll give you the teachings that you are requesting. You just stay down there." Samten Gyatso made the necessary prostrations and sat there. Sabdug Rinpoche said to Samten Gyatso, "Duk dah paaah, mm, mm, mm!" Samten Gyatso just stayed there for a little bit and the Sabdug Rinpoche just stayed there, sitting right up. Samten Gyatso said to him, "Could you unravel that for me a little bit? Sabdug Rinpoche said, "Okay, okay, okay. Duk dah paaah, mm, mm, mm." He did that again but a little bit louder and more expansively. And again, Sabdug Rinpoche just stayed there, sitting upright. Samten Gyatso said to him, "You know, we're pretty stupid people. We don't really get it. If you could say it a little more clearly, please?" And Sabdug Rinpoche said, "Okay, okay. Now watch carefully. Duk dah paaah, mm, mm, mm." This time he did it very effusively, though the words and movement were the same as before. And again, he just sat upright afterwards, without saying a word. Samten Gyatso had gotten as much as he was going to get, so he said, "Okay", got up, and went quietly back home. At home, he started to think a bit about what Sabdug Rinpoche had done and said to try to get the meaning. And, as he thought about it, it suddenly occurred to him that there was a meaning in it. The

meaning is about rigpa. What Sabdug Rinpoche was showing was the totally unfurled, all-encompassing state of rigpa. Once you have recognized that, you have your own ability to stand in your own place because rigpa, unlike mind, has its own innate strength and is never dragged around by sense perceptions. You see, what he was pointing to is something that you cannot speak in words. If you really say it straight, you cannot do it in words. Thus, Samten Gyatso got the meaning.

There is a very famous verse by Rahula, the son of The Buddha concerning Prajnaparamita, The first line says,

“Prajnaparamita which is beyond expression
through speech or thought.”

The meaning is that there is an ultimate reality that can be experienced. It is something that you have to get to for yourself. However, that reality, which is given the name Prajnaparamita in this case, is something which cannot in any way at all be thought of—because that implies dualistic thought—and cannot in any way at all be expressed in words. Thus it is totally inexpressible.

It might not be expressible to others but it is something that you can know for yourself. This ultimate reality is actually a type of knower that you have innate to you. Put most precisely, it is not just any knowing but it the particular type of knowing which knows itself. Therefore it is called self-knowing rigpa wisdom.

There is the example of a small child, three or four years old, who goes into a Tibetan temple with its walls covered in extraordinary frescoes. A child of that age will just go in there and look. He is not making distinctions about this and that, he is just looking and seeing and knowing it. The point is that when you stay in rigpa there is no grasping whatsoever.

There are some circumstances in which rigpa can come very easily. If you have been introduced to and are capable of recognizing rigpa, then these can be extremely beneficial circumstances. Of course, if the person concerned does not know about rigpa, then these are just another circumstance within delusion. For example, it is said that if you go to a very high mountain peak, struggle up to the top of it and then, when you get to the top all worn out, sit down and look out at the vast open expanse, it is more than likely that you will have a very naked experience of rigpa. Another time in which a strong experience of rigpa can come along is when you are very surprised or shocked. At that point, the dualistic mind can be knocked out of the way and it is possible for a very naked experience of rigpa to happen.

Generally speaking, rigpa is something that we all have with us continuously. It is always there but we do not know it. Is it here now? Yes, absolutely, definitely. It is there all the time. It is there whatever you are doing and whenever you are doing it. As you drink, as you eat, as you go to the toilet, as you sleep; it is always there with you. It is just that, usually, you are not recognizing it.

It is easy to recognize it. You just have to drop thinking and it is right there. There is not a lot to be done. You do not have to do this and that and the other. It is like the example of trying to touch space with your finger. To touch space, you do not have to move your finger at all, do you—it is already touching space, isn't it?

The dualistic consciousnesses that you live with have rigpa inside them but you have the small problem that you are not usually aware of that which is really, really close to you. For example, if you put a fine hair right up to your eye, you do not see it but if you put it far away, you do. Likewise, you can sit

and stay in its own character and, even though the rigpa is fully present, you do not see it because it is so close to you. Somehow, we think that rigpa has to be something really big, special, wonderful and because of that, because we do not have any trust in the fact of it being there, it is not possible for us to contact it and so liberate ourselves.

Rigpa is not really different from emptiness. When you are practising rigpa, you neither have to think, “This is empty”, nor, “This is not empty”. Why? Because as soon as you think something, immediately you have become involved with mind and its way of knowing things. This thing which does not require, or actually does not involve thinking, is with you already. It is empty already and it is enough just to recognize it.

For formal meditation on rigpa, you sit in meditation posture, let the mind be in its own character, then bring out the clarity factor, the luminosity of mind. Moreover, you bring it out so that it is really there without anything in the way.

It is a very important point to remember that the clarity factor is just an abbreviation for the luminosity factor, and to understand that these words are metaphors for knowing and do not mean that there is some kind of light that you are making with your mind. There is nothing constructed about the luminosity; it is the innate knower that comes forth automatically simply because it is there.

Some people become confused over this word luminosity and its abbreviation, clarity. Too many people think that it means there is some kind of light. In Sanskrit and Tibetan, the word clarity is an abbreviation of the word luminosity. Clarity in this case actually means that something has become evident because of light. The function of luminosity is that it illuminates something and makes it visible or knowable.

Clarity is just an abbreviation of that meaning. This was a word that The Buddha used specifically to mean the knowing quality of the mind; mind illuminates and hence knows. The word means illumination but is a metaphor for the knowing quality of mind.

If we talk about either luminosity or clarity as a factor of the essence of mind, it only means that the essence of mind has the quality of illuminating and knowing whatever it knows.

The word “luminosity” has been translated as “clear light” by some translators but that is a very bad and very mistaken translation which causes many problems. When I was in France one time, a man came to me and he said, “I’ve been practising Secret Mantra Vehicle very hard for a long time.” He had heard these words “clear light” and assumed that that was the goal. He said to me, “I experienced this massive light, and I’ve realized it. I’ve got it. I realized the clear light because I have this massive light going on.” Unfortunately, he had gone in a totally wrong direction because of the mistranslation.

You do your practice and recognize rigpa. Then, usually, at some point you will slide off that. The strength of the luminosity weakens further and further and the non-dualistic knowing gradually dims. Eventually you fall into the darkness which is the sleep of dualistic knowing again. At that point, the rigpa has become covered over again.

You need to get a very clear recognition of rigpa to start with. Here, when I say clear, I do not mean forced. I mean that it should be very obvious, very naked. We say that the inner secret needs to be brought out. You do not have to work hard, meaning you do not need a lot of conceptual effort, to do this. Rather, just rest, then look at it directly. Then, without your creating it at all, it will just come out.

All of these instructions use words saying to do this and do that. For instance, I said that you have to bring out the inner secret. However, when you are actually practising, you do not really do anything. What we are doing here is talking about bringing forth the view. Once the view is there, you meditate on it, except that in this practice, there is no meditation to be done. You just sit there, remaining in the view that you have brought forth. You just sit there, and you do the practice except that there is nothing to do. There has to be a sense of great confidence without a lot of conceptual labelling. You cease to be conceptually concerned with whether you are in rigpa or not as part of the technique of staying in rigpa. According to this style of practice, there is a saying used by practitioners of rigpa,

“I see it or do not see it,
I wander in samsara or do not wander in
samsara,
I recognize it or do not recognize it.”

THE SPECIAL ORAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR TRAINING RIGPA

I. Beginning Rigpa Practice

Once the student has been introduced to rigpa, the next step is to train the rigpa, like an athlete trains their basic potential to the point where they have great skill in what that potential can actually do.

The training in rigpa requires some general knowledge of the terminology of the system and distinctions taught in the system. I made a start on explaining those things in the previous chapter. The actual instructions in the practice come as a special kind of oral instruction called *upadeśha*, meaning the foremost of instructions. These special oral instructions address the various issues that practitioners come up with as they try to train the rigpa up following their initial introduction to it. This chapter consists of a number of these special oral instructions that beginning practitioners would to be given.

a. The Duration of Rigpa

Rigpa does not stay for a long time for most beginners. It comes for a moment and then you become distracted from it. It goes like this: you recognize it; then you stay with it for a very short time; then it finishes because you fall back into dualistic mind. Since it is that way, there is the instruction to recognize it for very short periods but to do that many, many times. The instruction is like a slogan:

“Short periods, many times.”

At first rigpa might only come for a few instants. You practise at staying with it because of which the duration slowly lengthens to one minute, maybe two minutes. If you keep working it at, it will come for longer and longer.

Going to buddhahood is like going from one side of a country to another. As you go, you will meet forests, then perhaps open plains, then perhaps mountains, then open plains, more mountains, and finally you will arrive at the other side. The journey to buddhahood is up and down, sometimes with a clear approach and sometimes with a big obstacle in the way.

Eventually, you might be able to stay in it for about an hour. If you manage to stay in rigpa for one hour, it is said that you have reached the level of an arhat. If you can stay in rigpa for half a day, then it is said that you have reached the stage of a bodhisatva. And if you can stay in rigpa for a whole day continuously, twenty-four hours without break, then that is it; you are a buddha. In that case, it is said that, in one human lifetime, you have achieved the mind of a buddha.

b. Emptiness and Fear and Rigpa

For beginners, there is often an experience of fear as they approach emptiness. Sometimes that fear takes a lot of work

to cross and sometimes it is a passing pre-cursor to the greater experience of rigpa.

This kind of fear is good, not bad. Why? Because it is a sign that you have been meditating. It is another type of temporary experience that comes to meditators. So, if you find yourself becoming afraid in that way, you should just keep going gently, and eventually you will come into rigpa.

If you really contact emptiness well, you can have a very strong experience of rigpa. In that case, the rigpa is very clear and pure because rational mind is not intervening at all. In that kind of state, you cannot make those distinctions of, “It’s this, it’s that.” And, although there is nothing there because of the emptiness, there still is experience. It is said that this is something that you cannot understand conceptually and you cannot talk about with speech; it is something that you cannot express in any way at all. Another hallmark of this kind of pure rigpa is that there is nowhere that you can dwell at that time. There is no place within that experience where you are resting nicely and abiding as in shamatha. Rather, you are just staying in the rigpa without any dualistic need of a place to stay. This is the very best way.

It is important to understand that there is a difference between rigpa and emptiness. When talking about emptiness as a practical experience, we often use words like “nothingness” to describe the experience. Emptiness is experienced as the total absence of all solidified items of normal, dualistic experience. Rigpa is more than that, it is emptiness with appearance, both happening at the same time.

For beginners, there can be a progression towards experiencing rigpa. Some people experience fear as they contact the empty part of the rigpa. That kind of fear is part of the journey. It is something that you go past. The actual state which

is inexpressible but which still has content is the state of rigpa. That is the final view. That is it. Once you have recognized that, the final view, you then take that as the path all the way through to the end of the journey to enlightenment. There are many levels of view throughout the various vehicles to enlightenment. Rigpa, which is the view, is the final view of actuality. There is none higher. That really is it. Once you have recognized that, your job is to increase the length of time that you can stay in that state, the state of rigpa. You practise using the oral instructions of the path of Great Completion and, because of it, the length of time for which you can keep that state gets longer and longer, and those qualities that belong to that state—which are the qualities of enlightenment—increase further and further. Finally, when you can stay in it constantly, you have become a buddha. Your rigpa is now the full wisdom of a buddha and you naturally have all of the qualities of buddhahood.

c. Rigpa as Unified Emptiness and Appearance

Rigpa is the final view because it is unified emptiness-appearance. However, beginners tend to contact the empty side of rigpa at first and because of that do not have appearances within the rigpa. Thus, the state of rigpa is sometimes described to beginners as a state in which everything drops away but that does not mean that rigpa is emptiness alone. For a beginner, it might be that there are no appearances but it is not that there has to be no appearances. If appearances come, they are allowed to come. In training the rigpa, you have to take the attitude, “If appearances are not there, they are not there. If they are there, they are there.”

d. No Meditator, No Meditation

When you do the formal practice of training the rigpa, it is said, “There is no meditator and no meditation”. Sometimes it is said, “Nothing to be meditated on and no meditator either.” It is also said, “No meditator, no meditation, and no object even of the meditation.

e. Not Seeing is the Best Seeing

In relation to this kind of meditation, it is said that when you arrive at not seeing, meaning that you do not see any of the dualistically solidified items of experience, that is the sight of emptiness. You see emptiness but there is nothing to be seen and no-one to see it! It is said that this kind of “not seeing is the best seeing”. It is the very finest kind of seeing, because you are seeing what is real.

We say we see space. When you come to emptiness you will see space but what did you really see? If there were something to be seen, then you would see some thing. When you see emptiness, you see space, so what was there to see? That is it!

2. Continuing Rigpa Practice

When you do a formal practice of meditation, what happens? Does nothing whatsoever happen in mind, nothing whatsoever occur? Do you experience something like what you normally do when you are say, drinking a glass of water and are just there? What I am suggesting falls on the side of non-meditation. When I say, “nothing whatsoever”, I am referring to our common experience of just being here, with nothing special going on. For example, you are drinking a glass of water, and there is nothing special going on.

That is rigpa, exactly. Normally, when we are doing whatever we do, we are just doing whatever we do. There is the dualism of this and that in that experience but, from a certain perspective, there is nothing going on at all. Rigpa also is an absence of doing anything special, just like that. The difference is that rigpa has no dualising within it.

a. Discursive Thought Will Come

The practice of rigpa does not mean that there should not be any thinking whatsoever. It is that there will not be any thoughts of the sort that are associated with the dualism of grasped-grasping. In fact, it could not be that there would be no thinking whatsoever, because if it were that way, it would mean that you had just gone stupid-unconscious.

b. Discursive Thoughts are Allowed to Happen

Discursive thought will come up in the state of rigpa. In order to deal with this you need to allow whatever happens to happen. Whatever comes up, whatever does or does not happen, you allow that to happen. This is similar to what I described before for shamatha practice but there is a difference. Here, you have taken the attitude that the basic space is rigpa and that anything could happen within that. Here, you are not trying to develop a dualistic shamatha but are taking a specific approach that allows for rigpa to develop. When the thought arises, if there is no grasping with it, fine. If just a tiny weenie bit of grasping comes with it, let that come. If a moderate amount of grasping happens with it, then, all right, that happened. If a really coarse, heavy-duty grasping happens, then, fine, that happened, too. You just let it happen.

That is the attitude that you have to take, however, beginners will lose rigpa to discursive thoughts very easily.

c. Eventually, Discursive Thoughts Self-liberate

Generally speaking, when beginners do this practice, they see rigpa for just one or two instants then again become distracted from it because of discursive thought continuing on rather than returning to the rigpa itself. When that happens, you look hither again, and come back to the rigpa again. That will usually last for only another couple of instants then you will become distracted again. Therefore, you look hither again and you come back to the rigpa for another couple of instants. Then you get distracted again. And so on. Eventually the habit pattern of distracted thoughts, will diminish and the thoughts themselves will become a cause of the rigpa returning. At that time, the discursive thoughts arise in the usual way but, unlike the usual situation, not only is the discursive thought known but simultaneously the discursive thought is liberated. Instead of being grasped at, it is just allowed to be, and therefore it just falls apart of itself. In that case, that means that you arrive at emptiness.

d. Tempering Rigpa

There are times when the rigpa appears to lose its strength. At that time, what you need to do is to intensify the rigpa. This is actually a problem with the clarity portion, not the emptiness portion. Therefore, there are instructions on strengthening the clarity portion to counteract the problem. There are various techniques for doing so but one is to say, “Ha, ha, ha.” You do it really strongly but slowly. It really does help the strength of the rigpa.

In relation to this, some people talk about the brightness of rigpa and say, “Brighten up your rigpa”. This misleads students and makes them think that there is a light that has to be brightened. The problem is bad translation. The word in the Tibetan is to intensify and in fact, the exact meaning

is to temper, just as you would temper steel to bring out its innate strength.

e. Rigpa Comes More easily At Some Times

It is not uncommon for practitioners to find that some times of the day and night are much easier for the recognition of rigpa and resting in the state. Similarly, it is usual to find that other times are very difficult for this. If this happens, it is because of the constitution of the body all together. Can anything be done about it? There is nothing you can do about it. Of course, if you practise a lot, then it will slowly change.

f. Temporary Experiences

One practitioner said, “I had a strange experience. Everything started to appear translucent. What should be done?”

It is true in general that all sorts of different things will happen because of meditation. In fact, it is said, “It is not possible for all sorts of different things not to happen”. The approach to take is that it does not matter if they do arise.

Practitioners have all sorts of experiences arise in connection with their rigpa—pleasure, pain, boredom, etcetera. The key issue is not to cling to them. If you cling to them, then they only become a cause of wandering around in samsara. You have to take the attitude that these various experiences are not so important. In each case, it is whatever it is. Think that way.

If you cling to these temporary experiences, you have just bound yourself up. It is fine for temporary experience to come but clinging to it is a really big danger. Not seeking it out, not making it into a big deal is a good way not to be caught up by it. However, the main thing is to have a non-grasping mind, then you will not alter whatever situation does arise.

g. Radiance is Not Rigpa

One practitioner said, “A great feeling of radiance happened for the first few moments or so of practice. I think that is rigpa.”

This radiance is not rigpa because radiance means light and light is a thing that is made. It is something that you produce. Therefore it could not possibly be rigpa. If you experience radiance as rigpa, that is not going to be rigpa. In that case, rigpa would have turned into a colour and it would have a shape. You might even start thinking, “I am even more important than or better than The Buddha.” The Buddha himself did not find rigpa but now you are saying, “I found rigpa”.

h. Concentrated States of Mind are Not Rigpa

One practitioner said, “I have an experience which is like no-thought concentration but it does have a knower in it.”

The essential feature of your experience is concentration and that concentration is not an end in itself. That concentration needs to be looked into. The way to do the practice is to arrive at the point you described but then to continue by looking into the essence of that. If you look into that properly, you will find that it is empty. When you find its emptiness, just stay there with that. That is enough.

If you have something that you look at, and you really look at its essence, and it really does not change, then it means it was the essence of mind already. Because of that, it was rigpa. There is an oral instruction regarding this,

“When examined, if it still stays the same, then it is rigpa.”

i. The Proper Way to Look

To look properly means this. You ask, “How is my mind?” This is not hard. When you look to see how your mind is, you might say, “What is the mind that I am going to look at to see how it is?” That is easy, too. The very thing that thinks, “I am going to look”, is the very thing that you are going to look at.

There is an oral instruction about the way to look. It is said,

“It is as though your eyes were looking through the back of your head instead of looking forwards.”

It is as though your eyes are looking backwards instead of forwards as they usually do. You are looking out with your eyes but are looking back at the same time. Do not try too hard with this though, otherwise you will really make a big mistake. You just sort of look back at your mind and say, “Who am I? Where am I? What is this?” When you do that, do you see the thing that is thinking? That is enough!

3. Sleep as Rigpa Practice

Development of rigpa practice during sleep is a special key point. To do it, you have to do as much rigpa practice as possible before you go to sleep. Then as the time approaches, you let the mind be at ease and rested. If you approach it in the right way, so that up to the point of sleeping your rigpa is well established and at the time you are going to sleep you are at ease and rested, then the whole of your sleep can become rigpa practice.

Because of that possibility, it is likewise important in general, as you are nodding off, whether it is on your cushion

or any other time, that you make the effort to put that nodding off together with the practice. There was one Indian mahasiddha who made his practice just that. His name was Lavapa, “the woolen blanket man”. He went to sleep for twelve years and by doing so accomplished the siddhi of Mahamudra. In other words, he became a buddha by sleeping.

The main point is that, until the point that you are sleeping, you must do as much rigpa practice as possible. It should be good rigpa practice, which means there is no hope and fear in it.

RIGPA IS UNIFIED

APPEARANCE–EMPTINESS

I. Confused and Unconfused Appearances

How is it for us at present? We have fallen into cyclic existence because of being confused. Being confused in this case specifically means taking something to be true, when in fact, it is not true. Where does this confusion arise from? It arises in the mind. It arises because of clinging to discursive thoughts. The Buddha himself has said that all of the various appearances that there are, are appearances coming from confusion. At the time when The Buddha was making the statement, one deva questioned The Buddha on the matter. He said, “If all of the appearances of this world—which includes mountains, rocks, and all of the substances of the world which are the way we experience them, hard and solid—are confused, where does that hardness, where does the solidity of it come from?” The Buddha gave an example to illustrate how it was. He told the story of an earlier time in Varanasi, when there was an older woman who practised a meditation

in which she was thinking of herself as a horse. As part of her practice, she would go about acting like a horse. One day, she actually turned into a horse. Then all of the people in the village became very frightened and ran away and the village was emptied. The Buddha explained that if it was possible for her through a relatively short period of thinking that she was a horse to actually turn into a horse, you can easily understand how it is possible, given beginningless lifetimes of habit patterns that sentient beings have developed, to create a world that is entirely solid.

There is another story about a person who did not believe in the Buddhist system but in another system. He did not enjoy the frivolity of the world and, because of that, had taken up a particular meditation and developed stability in it. He was doing his practice at Bodhgaya. There was a lot of distraction all around but he did not pay attention and did his practice. He was concentrating on making sound internally and because of that he heard a very loud sound outside. This external sound that he heard was simply the result of his practising his meditation on the sounds. In a similar way, these various appearances that happen to us and constitute our world come from our minds. They arise from the karmas that we have created through actions done in the past. In this way, we create the whole world that we live in.

There are the six classes of migrators, the six main types of beings in cyclic existence. One of them is the gods who live in the god realms. Everything in the god realms is given over to enjoyment. Everything is very pleasant. All of the trees and so forth are very beautiful and made of precious substances. The gods see their realm as a heaven. Another one is the hell beings. How do the hell beings see things? Everything is very unpleasant. They see the mountains as being

made of burning iron. They see the trees as being like weapons. Water is really horrible, boiling. That is how they see their world. Another one is the human realm. You know what the human realm is like.

If this world that we humans see around us really existed truly the way it appears, it would also have to be that the beings in the god realms and the beings in the hell realms would also have to see just that but they do not. In the hell realms, the beings in their excruciating pain are screaming, “Ah, eeh, aaah!” Do we hear that? No. Their environment is not something we experience. In the god realms, the gods are busy having a really wonderful time. Everything is just a wonderful time, like a party. Do we see a big party around us? No. In that way, you can understand that all of these appearances are just a product of our confusion. The particular appearances that you have for yourself are not things that are seen by hell beings or the gods. They are what is called “self-appearances”. Self-appearances means appearances that appear just for oneself because of one’s own karmic habits. Self-appearances are part of a confused state of existence.

Thus, because of a fundamental process of confusion, you see your particular world and other sentient beings see their particular worlds. The confusion for each sentient being is the same basic mistake but comes out differently, because of each being’s different karma. A group of people in their own realm—god, human, hell, or whatever—gathered in the same place do see the same thing—more or less—and this is because all of them have a very similar type of karmic confusion operating at that time.

The purpose of meditation is to clear off this confusion. When all of the confusion is cleared, the impure appearances

that come from it are also cleared, and the person becomes a buddha. A buddha has not one speck of confusion.

There are some people who think that, because a buddha has eliminated all impure appearances, he is in a closed-off existence where there is no experience for him, nothing at all, because all possible appearances have been cleared off for him. However, it is not like that. As a buddha-to-be clears off confused appearances, the enlightened qualities—which are summed up in the all-knowledge, love, and capability that I mentioned earlier—increase. When the person finally becomes a buddha, he knows everything all at once but is not caught by the kind of grasping that we have so does not have any of the impure, karmic appearances that we have. Even though he does not have the impure appearances that we have, he still knows everything that we apprehend. This is described as “seeing the things which cannot be seen and knowing the things which could not be known”.

Since a buddha knows of but is not caught within our impure appearances, a buddha knows of but is not subject to the great human sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, and death. Some people object and say that, when you look at Shakyamuni Buddha’s life story, he did have those great sufferings; apparently he died, and so forth. However, all of those activities that seemed to be human were in fact things done for the sake of conforming to human experience so that humans could relate to The Buddha and tread the path because of it. By showing the appearance of birth and so on, he could urge humans to get on with their path. He said of himself, “I am outside all of this. I am beyond all of this. I am not caught in birth, old age, sickness, and death. I have gone to the place of peace, to nirvana.” And he told his followers, “You

have not done that yet. You need to get on with the path that leads there, yourselves.”

Buddhas show themselves in different ways and not all of them die in a conventional way. For example, Guru Rinpoche has not passed away yet. He was born on the northern border of India, spent the early part of his life studying in India, then went north to Tibet where he stayed for some time. After that, he went to another place in this world system and is still there. Guru Rinpoche did not die in Tibet. There is just no history of such a thing. He is still here in this world system. He said himself that he will not die until space is emptied. This is called having the body which is beyond birth, old age, sickness, and death. How can it be this way? It can happen because the essence of mind is beyond the circumstances of conventional death.

What are external appearances? In the unique way of talking of the Great Completion, they really are the liveliness, the energetic display of rigpa. It seems as though external appearances and internal appearances are two separate things but in fact they are not. They are the same thing and because of that, it is quite possible to have complete independence from whatever happens.

Thus a buddha, for example Guru Rinpoche, cannot be harmed in any way at all. No matter what effort is made to harm a buddha, not even a hair pore on his body can be harmed. We can see this in the story of what happened just prior to Shakyamuni Buddha becoming fully enlightened. In the third watch of the night, all of the maras gathered together into one giant army and used whatever means were at their disposal to try to harm The Buddha-to-be. They sent down all sorts of weaponry—hammers, knives, and masses of fire—but they were not able, using any of their methods, to harm

even so much as a hair pore on his body. Mind has that kind of capacity in it.

This particular subject of confused appearance is one of several topics that are important to the practice of rigpa. Therefore, it is necessary to understand it and to understand it well. First you understand this as theory before doing rigpa practice. Then you start rigpa practice and there will be issues of how appearances arise within the formal sessions of meditation. Following that there will be issues of how appearances arise in the period following formal meditation. A rigpa practitioner has to develop understandings of appearance in all these circumstances.

Say there are two people travelling along together, one of them a good yogin of Great Completion and the other just an ordinary person. For the ordinary person, whatever happens, there is always going to be some extent of really liking or not liking something. They are always going to be caught in liking and not liking, "This is good. This is bad." The yogin will proceed gently through all of those different experiences without particularly feeling that things are likable or not likable. All things for the yogin are understood as confused appearance. Taking them to be real, as the ordinary person does, is just like a child approaching their childish things. A yogin who has complete assurance of the view, looks at these things and laughs. Therefore, the tradition has saying for that kind of practitioner, "Spacious and beyond rational mind". A yogin who has been practising the path automatically has a spacious mind and has gone beyond the concerns of, "It's this, it's that, it's the other." The yogin is just beyond mind in that sense.

2. Appearances and Emptiness

Emptiness means something is not produced, that is, born, to start with, that it does not dwell anywhere in the interim, and that it does not go to cessation somewhere. Emptiness means that there is nothing truly there but, at the same time, things are appearing.

All of these appearances here are empty, aren't they? They do not have any birth do they? They do not go somewhere to an end, do they? They do not dwell, do they? If you really say it straight, they do not have anything to them. So in that way, while there is nothing there, they appear. That is emptiness. There isn't anything else other than that.

Some people think that emptiness is something very special, some wondrous thing. Some think that emptiness will be an amazing experience, with some massive kind of light. Some think that some very special thing that is going to come down on them. It is none of those things. Previously in Tibet, there was one particularly expert scholar, named Sakya Pandita. At one time he was travelling around and met a meditator. He asked the meditator, "What's emptiness?". The meditator replied, "Emptiness is this really incredible thing. It is like stones and gold. In fact, it is even better than those things. It is incredible, it is wonderful, it is amazing", and so on. Sakya Pandita was quite sad at hearing this and thought to himself that sentient beings have such a wrong views about emptiness. Because of that, he wrote a very large treatise on emptiness and related matters.

Previously, I said that emptiness is said to be like a dream and like an illusion and following on from that, I went through forms, analysed them, decided that they were made of atoms, and then went further than that and decided that they were

not there. Thus we know that form is empty. Likewise, if we take the mindstream and dissect it into instants of consciousness, then take each of those instants and analyse them, we find that even those instants do not exist. In that way consciousness also is empty, isn't it?

The Sanskrit word for emptiness, “shunyata”, has two parts, etymologically speaking. The first part, “shunya”, literally means “empty”. The second part “ta” means that, even though things are empty to start with, there still are appearances. All together, the word means that there is nothingness and that there are appearances occurring while there is the nothingness. The two things of appearance and emptiness go together that way. For example, in *The Heart Prajnaparamita Sutra*, it says,

“Form is emptiness, emptiness is form;
emptiness is no other than form; form is no
other than emptiness.”

3. Rigpa Practice Ends Up as Appearance–Emptiness

The practice of Great Completion is that you come to a cognition of the basic sphere, which is rigpa. Having come to the cognition of that basic sphere, you practise it. The practice in the beginning often lands more on the emptiness side but rigpa is unified emptiness so the key point of this chapter is that rigpa practice should become a practice of unified appearance-emptiness.

You must understand that, for a beginner, rigpa only comes for a very short period. It comes for one or two finger snaps and then it is finished. The practice then is to recognize the rigpa and do it many times. The special oral instruction for this says,

“Short sessions, many sessions”

To help the practice along there is a special oral instruction that says,

“Devotion to the guru above;
Compassion to sentient beings below;
The deity at your own level.”

This means that sometimes you can supplicate your guru with strong devotion, and through that strong devotion, some opening will happen, and you can do your practice on the basis of that opening. Doing that is called, “going up to the guru”. On the other hand, sometimes you can “go down to sentient beings” and have compassion down to them. In that case again, there is some opening, and you can do your rigpa on the basis of that. Then, as a third possibility, there is “going to yourself in the middle”; some times you can visualize yourself as a deity, such as Vajrasatva, and do the practice, and then again there is a possibility of opening, and you can do your practice on that basis.

Later, when you get to the point that you do have some ability at rigpa practice, it will be possible to do anything—including all of the preliminaries discussed earlier of taking refuge, arousing the enlightenment mind, visualizing yourself as the deity, and so forth—within rigpa. For the beginner, on the other hand, the approach will be more like this. Perhaps you are taking refuge. In taking refuge, you are definitely there taking refuge, so you look right back at the person, at the thing that is taking refuge, and right there you penetrate to rigpa, and do your rigpa practice with that. Likewise at the point of having compassion for sentient beings, as you are having compassion for sentient beings, you can look back right at the one who is having compassion for sentient beings.

Finding rigpa there, you can just rest in its own character in that. Likewise when you are doing development stage practice, you look right into the mind that is doing the development stage practice, and then it is the same thing; if you do it that way, you are putting development stage together with completion stage, which is the ultimate practice called unified development-completion stage.

The preceding paragraph was talking about rigpa practice but you could also do it from the point of view of emptiness. For example, in the case of taking refuge, you would be taking refuge, and then you would look to see is there somebody taking refuge? Is there some object that is being taken refuge in? Is there actually an action of taking refuge in the refuge object? You would analyse the whole thing down to emptiness that way. When you do so, you come out to the fact there is nothing there. That is the emptiness portion. Then you just rest again in its own character in that. Likewise, with compassion for sentient beings; as you are doing that practice, you look to see whether there really is a person arousing the compassion? Is there really an object of the compassion? Is there really a meditation on compassion? You come to the fact that there is really nothing there. Then you stay with that. Likewise for development stage practice; you look into that and ask, "Is there a meditator of the development stage? Is there a deity that is being meditated on?" And so forth and so on. You come to the answer, "No, there is not." Again, you just rest in its own character on that.

In the case of using emptiness as the way to do your practice, if you practise that way, you end up accumulating an extraordinary amount of merit. What does this mean? Say you are taking refuge. In taking refuge, there is somebody taking refuge, there is a refuge object, and there is a practice

of taking refuge. You look into that and ask, “Is there actually somebody taking refuge? Is there actually a refuge object? Is there actually a practice?” And you see that there is not. When you stay with that experience of there not being anything there, you are not just accumulating virtuous merit but are accumulating what is called “un-outflowed virtuous merit”⁴⁴. This is a very special kind of merit; it has the quality that, whereas ordinary merit does get exhausted, this does not.

Thus, there are both out-flowed and un-outflowed ways to take refuge. Likewise, there are both outflowed and un-outflowed ways to practise of compassion. Likewise, there is both an outflowed development stage and an un-outflowed development stage. In other words, there are two sides to each of the practices that I have been telling you about. There is an outflowed side and an unoutflowed side. When you are first introduced to these practices, because you could not really manage to do the un-outflowed practice, it is hard to talk about both of them so most people only know the outflowed style of practice. However, with recognition of rigpa, it is also possible that you could begin to do the un-outflowed style of these practices.

The way to go about it is to try to put each of those outflowed and un-outflowed practices together as you go along. For example, you have outflowed refuge then you try to put it together with un-outflowed refuge. You have outflowed compassion then try to put it together with un-

⁴⁴ Outflowed refers to the situation in which wisdom cannot remain self-contained but spills out and turns into a dualistic mind situation. That situation is defiled because of it but the word means that an outflow has occurred in the way described. Unoutflowed means that wisdom has been able to remain self-contained.

outflowed compassion. You have development stage then you try to put it together with un-outflowed development stage.

If you work on that for a while, the point will come where you will actually be able to do the whole thing completely within emptiness. Then you will have the most authentic taking of refuge, and so on because it the whole practice is appearing but happening at the same time within emptiness. That right there is the chief point of all.

CONTINUITY OF PRACTICE

The next important point is having a continuous approach to your meditation practice.

1. Two Styles of Practice

There will be a few who have the real assurance necessary to be able to abandon worldly activity and go into strict retreat for an extended period of time. If you can do that, it would be good and there is no fault with doing so. However, for many people that it not possible and for them, this practice should be done without abandoning normal activities.

In fact, with rigpa practice it is not necessary to dispense with worldly activity. In the practice of rigpa, you are allowed to do anything that you would normally do and there is no fault with that at all. In fact, as long as you are doing formal practice, your normal activities become a means of profiting from formal practice.

2. Formal Practice Is a Must

Whichever path you take, you must not give up formal practice; as it says in one Great Completion text,

“Until you attain buddhahood, there are sessions to be done.”

For your formal practice, remember the key points of body: set your body straight; put your hands on your knees or in the equipoise mudra; and, with your eyes open, have your gaze going straight out. Note that in rigpa practice, with your eyes gazing directly forward, it is not that you are particularly focussed on one thing or another but it also does not mean that you do not see what is out there. You do see what is out there. It is said that, in terms of doing rigpa practice, one thing you can do to really help the practice is to go and sit in a place where you can see empty space before you, then look up slightly into that empty space. There is just space there, and you look up slightly into that.

For those who have not gone into retreat, the best thing to do is to set aside specific times, preferably in the morning and evening, for formal meditation practice. Doing that will help your practise to develop further. Then, in the times between the formal practice, when you are out and about with your various activities, whatever you are doing, try to mix your rigpa practice in with whatever it is you are doing.

3. Rigpa Practice Should Be Mixed with Every Activity

You definitely need to continue on with your meditation practice. As you go about your daily business, you will be involved with all sorts of different things and circumstances. This is fine and you do not have to lose rigpa practice because

of it. You can be drinking a glass of water and can put your rigpa practice together just with the drinking the glass of water. Then a moment later, you might be writing something, so you put your rigpa practice together with that.

As sentient beings, we go around, and it seems as though we are involved with this and then that, and then something else. You can take each of those things and put your rigpa practice together with it; it can be anything at all—drinking tea, driving a car, even cutting wood. It is not the case that you cannot put your rigpa practice together with anything, to the contrary, you are allowed to that. And you can!

When you are involved with work that is especially taxing, mix your rigpa practice together with it. You certainly can do it! Try to do it to the extent that you can. The rigpa probably will not come along very much. It probably will only come along for one or two instants but still, as much as you can, put it together with whatever it is that you are doing.

Sometimes, when you are going about your business, doing whatever you are doing, it might be that you have something that involves you in difficult work. At that time, try to mix it with your practice. In fact, it is perfectly fine to have very difficult work which really puts you on the spot as far as the sheer difficulty of the work and its tendency to draw you into distraction from rigpa. It is fine to mix your practice with that kind of work because you can use it to make your practice stronger.

Another circumstance in which you can do your practice is when you are lying down. Lie down and put your rigpa practice together with that. You are allowed to do that.

All of your activity then, can be mixed together with your rigpa practice. If you do it that way, you start to extract the profit from the basic thing of rigpa all together.

ASSURANCE OF RIGPA

If you have the idea that you would like to make your Great Completion practice strong and good, so that you have complete assurance of rigpa, then you need to start at the beginning, which is the practice of the preliminaries.

The general preliminaries of the Vajra Vehicle begin with the Four Mind Reversers. These four collectively are the way to turn the mind around so that it stops facing towards cyclic existence and instead faces away from it towards definite release. The final state of mind that you need to develop through contemplating them is a deep feeling that cyclic existence has no value to it, that it is worthless, that it is nothing but unsatisfactory from top to bottom. When you come to this understanding, you have come to the first of the Four Truths of the Noble Ones.

After that, there are the four preliminaries to be done one hundred thousand times each. The first is called taking refuge but in fact includes arousing the enlightenment mind and is done throughout with prostrations. Doing these practices opens you to the beings and truths that will be your refuge

and guide on the path and commits you to them. You offer one hundred thousand prostrations to complete the practice.

The Four Mind Reversers brought you to the first Truth of the Noble Ones. Therefore, the next step is that the causes of suffering have to be cleared off. That is done by the next of the four practices, the meditation and recitation of Vajrasatva. Specifically, you recite the Vajrasatva hundred-syllable mantra one hundred thousand times. Doing so clears off all the degrading actions and obscurations of body, speech and mind.

Buddhahood comes through the completion of the two accumulations. Therefore, having cleansed yourself, you now accumulate the two accumulations. To do that, you do the third practice of offering the mandala and do it one hundred thousand times

Finally in order to be entered into the path of the Vajra Vehicle, you need the blessings of the teacher. You bless yourself by doing the fourth practice, the practice of guru yoga, one hundred thousand times.

After that, you can be entered into the Vajra Vehicle. You are entered into it by empowerment into the mandala of a deity. Then you do the practices of the Vajra Vehicle, all of which are contained within the two phases called development stage and completion stage. Development stage practice is the practice of visualizing yourself as a deity. Completion stage has two levels: completion stage with signs followed by completion stage without signs. Completion stage with signs is the practice of winds, channels, and drops. In this practice, you train and cleanse the winds, channels, and drops of your body.

All the preliminaries discussed up till now are regarded as the common preliminaries for Great Completion practice. What are the uncommon preliminaries for Great Completion practice? There are quite a lot of them. The principal one is called “Parting Samsara and Nirvana.” There are others, too, and if you do them, it takes quite a few years. You also need to spend a lot of time attending a guru. That is how it has usually been done. However, these days, there is not much time. People are very busy and so forth so the students end up not spending much time attending the guru, and the gurus do not have much time to work on their students. That being the case, we need a more rapid approach. Therefore, instead of doing all of these preliminaries for years and years, it is possible to go directly to beginning of the main part of Great Completion practice, which is the introduction to rigpa. It is not wrong to do this because, if you do meet with rigpa when it is introduced to you, then it is not necessary to have done all those preliminary steps like that.

Therefore, if you were to be introduced to rigpa and successfully meet with it and then were to mix your practice with the Four Mind Reversers, it would be all right. Saying it very straightforwardly, if you do manage to meet with rigpa through being given the introduction to it, then whichever way you do it comes to be all right. Of course, though, if you do it the way it was done in the past, where you spend a long time on the preliminaries going through them all step by step, then when you finally do get introduced to rigpa your recognition of it will be very good and when you do practise rigpa, your experience of it will be very solid, stable, and profound.

The introduction to rigpa is given by your guru. At that time, most people do recognize rigpa even if the recognition is very fleeting or not very strong. Even if the meeting with

rigpa only happened for a very short time, that is still very beneficial, because it is the basis for the rest of the practice; if you practise a lot after that, it is still possible to complete the practice because of it.

Once you have had an introduction and you have the feeling that you did recognize rigpa, even if you have a lot of doubts over it, then you have taken the first step of the path of Great Completion and do have the basis for continuing. The next step after that is to work at identifying clearly what rigpa is and what it is not. You do that until you have a certainty of what rigpa actually is. Following that, you familiarize yourself with the rigpa that you are now certain about until it manifests constantly in your being.

I. Understanding, Experiencing, and Realizing rigpa

We talk about meeting rigpa at three levels: conceptually understanding it, directly experiencing it, and realizing it.

a. Understanding

Understanding is that someone explains to you that there is mind on the one hand and rigpa on the other. They make a distinction between the two for you. Through that, you come to understand how each one sits and what its qualities are.

b. Experience

Having understood that and having heard the instructions from the guru on how to meet with rigpa yourself, you start the practice. You practise and practise, and it happens one day that you really clearly see it directly, you really get it. When that has happened, you have a confidence that you know what rigpa is through your own personal experience of it. That is called introduction to rigpa at the level of experience.

When this has happened and you see rigpa, you say, “Ah, this is just what my guru told me about!” You will have the thought, “It is really like this. This is the whole thing he was talking about. There is no grasping in this at all. I have really seen what he was talking about.”

c. Realization

On the basis of your experience, you continue your practice and then, at some point, you develop what is called assurance⁴⁵ in it. That assurance is such that even if The Buddha himself were to come along and say, “No, that is not it!”, you would know for yourself that it was it. You would be completely assured of your realization. That is the realization of rigpa.

This is a realization based on your own coming to a complete, firm, final and utter decision about what rigpa is, not through conception, but through experience. At this point, you have no fear about wandering through the three realms of existence. You do not have any concerns about falling down into the lower realms. You also do not have any hope about attaining buddhahood. The assurance that comes from your realization is such that you have completely eliminated any concerns or fears about going down and any hopes or desires for going up. Because of that, it is just impossible to go to the hells, for example.

There was a very great guru in Tibet called Chokgyur Lingpa and this is a story about his second manifestation. There was another man who had practised very hard for a long time and who had gained very high realization in Great Completion. He was very famous because of it. At one time he got very sick with a tumour on his belly that would open up

⁴⁵ Tib. gdeng. See the glossary.

and bleed blood and pus. The local people went to the second manifestation of Chokgyur Lingpa and said, "There is a great meditator here. He has fallen sick all of a sudden. It is quite serious. What can we do about that?" Chokgyur Lingpa summoned the man and gave various empowerments and so forth. In the middle of one of them, Chokgyur Lingpa had a conversation with the sick man. The man said, "I really have a serious, heartfelt request for you. It is such a strong request, and so heartfelt, that I would really ask you to grant it for me." On hearing this talk from somebody who is supposed to be very highly realized, Chokgyur Lingpa the second thought, "Hmmm. Maybe this man does not have so much meditative realization. After all, that is not the sort of talk that would come from somebody with a high level of realization." Then he felt quite a bit of compassion down for the man and said down to him, "All right, whatever help you need, just let me know, and I will try my very best to supply that for you." So the man made his request to Chokgyur Lingpa. He said, "Please whatever you can do for me, I want to be born in hell." He made that request. "I don't have any other request for you but somehow, by hook or by crook, I need to be born in hell. You have so much power, and so much ability, and I only have one request, I only have one hope. And that hope is that I will be born in hell." Chokgyur Lingpa was quite amazed at this. He realized that his man had very, very high realization. Why? Because this practitioner seated before him had attained the complete assurance of being quite happy to be reborn in the hell realms. Then Chokgyur Lingpa said down to the man, "You are sick these days." And the man replied, "No, I am not sick." Then he said, "Oh, there is an old man in my house who is sick." Then he said, "I am going to die at..." and he set a time. A little bit later, when that time came, he died just as he said he would. So there are people who really have

attained to very high realization of the Great Completion like that.

2. Perseverance Will Bring Naked Rigpa

Do you have the wish to get that kind of realization? You know, they say that if you really do practise, you can get realization. Why? Because we have what we need to get that realization right inside us. The whole thing then depends just on your perseverance.

If you had, from the time you were small up until your present age, worked at dharma, then you would really have something to show for it. It is said, “Buddha is in the palm of your hand”. So you have to persevere and have to meditate. Perseverance is extremely important.

If you, who are now capable of experiencing rigpa only for very short periods at a time, practise and work at your meditation, then one day, it will happen that you will get to an extremely clear state of rigpa. There will be no conceptualizing of this and that; no thoughts of, “I’ve got to do this” or “I’ve got to do that”; no thoughts of, “It is this” or “It is that”. There will be a state that is free from a meditator and a meditation, a state which is totally divorced from grasping. Within that state, there is nothing to do but just stay there, as-it-is. For the time that the state stays with you, there is nothing special about it at all. In fact, the whole practice of meditation is gone at that point. When that sort of thing starts to happen, you can start talking about having truly experienced rigpa. At that point, you have gone past the first level of introduction which I said was understanding. At that point, you have moved into the zone of experiencing and are also moving into the area of realizing rigpa.

You can have a very naked experience of rigpa like that. It can happen and you do not need to have much intellectual understanding, do not need to have heard a great deal of dharma, do not need to have understood a great deal of dharma for that to happen. At that point, you might find yourself saying, “Well, there is nothing more to do,” and just dump dharma at that point. Why? Because you got to the point where there is no meditation, nothing to be meditated on. However, we should make a distinction. Rigpa is separated from meditation and if you really have gone to that stage, then you could talk that way and it could be all right. But it might be, in that, that you became proud and started to think, “I’m at the point where there is no meditation to be done. Oh, I’ve really realized a very high view at this point.” If that is what is happening, you have just established yourself in distraction and are wandering around in that. There is another possibility, too. Some people could think, “Oh, this is kind of a nihilistic view that has happened to me”. They will mistake what it is, thinking that it is a kind of blank space with no clarity in it or something. There will be a lot of doubts about the experience that they had.

3. All Qualities Are Complete and Present Within Rigpa

You have to recognize the naked experience of rigpa, just as it is. You have to know it for what it is. Then, once you have gotten to that, that is it! When you get to that kind of experience, it is the completion of all other meditation practices. It is the completion of all of the different steps and stages involved in the dharma path such as revulsion for cyclic existence, the view of emptiness, compassion down for sentient beings, and devotion up to the guru. All of that is included there because you have put yourself into your own nature and that contains all of the good qualities that there are.

The nature of rigpa contains all of the good qualities that there are. Just as fire has the complete set of qualities of fire—hot, burning, and so forth—likewise rigpa has the complete set of qualities of enlightenment.

When you have the naked experience of rigpa that I am talking about here, and somebody, for example, comes before you who is sick, then, without any effort at all, just as a pure, natural expression pouring out from your rigpa, there will be compassion for that person. It is an effortless experience.

Likewise, you would find at times that there is an extraordinary devotion to your guru because the instructions that have come from him have allowed you to meet with the essence of your own mind and all of the qualities contained within it. Because you have tasted it, you know that it is true, you know how good it really is. And because it came from your guru, you appreciate his extraordinary kindness for what he has given. You just have total, natural devotion.

Likewise, when you see a person who is poorer in some way, there will be immediate compassion for that person.

Likewise, you know directly that all beings appearances are coming from delusion. You understand automatically that cyclic existence is empty, useless, valueless.

Likewise, you see that all appearances are just like illusions, like dreams. Thus, the view of emptiness becomes perfectly complete in that state of rigpa. You have complete certainty regarding emptiness, and that certainty is fully complete there.

Likewise, in rigpa, both development stage and completion stage are fully complete. Why? Because rigpa itself is the three kayas of a buddha. The deity that you visualize in development stage and which is an expression of the three kayas of a buddha is naturally complete within rigpa itself. It is

already there that way. Rigpa itself is wisdom that has direct sight of emptiness, so it is the completion stage, too. Rigpa has both the kayas and the wisdom that sees emptiness in it, so it is also the union of development and completion stages.

All of the good qualities of the path of dharma that have been discussed up to now are present in rigpa.

4. How to Stay in Rigpa and Re-recognize it As Needed

One of the key points of rigpa practice is that, when you are within the state of rigpa, if you start examining that state to see whether it is correct or not, you just lose the rigpa. Thus, once you have entered the state of rigpa, there is no need whatsoever for any hope or fear about anything. The story about Chokgyur Lingpa and the old meditator was to that point and I have discussed this several times before. Once you have entered rigpa, you just stay there. If it's rigpa, it's rigpa; if it's not rigpa, it's not rigpa; but you just stay there, anyway. Whether it's mind you've gone into or not mind, it doesn't matter; you just stay there. Whether you stay in rigpa or not, still you stay in it! Whether there are discursive thoughts coming up or not, still you stay with that. Whatever happens, happens; it is all right.

There is a knower in your experience, regardless of what is going on, isn't there? There is a kind of knower which, even though it is knowing, is not prattling on, "Oh, it's this, it's that." That kind of knower is existing continuously within you now. All you need to do is recognize it and doing that is really easy. Why? Because the whole thing is in your mind. It does not matter where you go, it is with you.

5. Special Methods for Recognizing Rigpa

There are various different methods for recognizing rigpa. For example, one is that you do some hard work or some kind of exercise then, all of a sudden, you just stop and rest and relax. That provides a contrast. A second way is to be very shocked, surprised, and because of that there can be a breakthrough. A third way is in meditation; you deliberately bring yourself to the very present moment and then look into that.

COMMITMENTS LEAD TO REALIZATION

In Secret Mantra Vehicle there is a thing called samaya. Samaya means sacred commitment. Samaya is a set of commitments that you make when you are entered into the Vajra Vehicle by your guru and when you receive certain instructions, such as those of Great Completion. If you keep the samaya commitments, it helps to maintain the energy of the realization that has been transmitted to you by your guru and does assist you to gain further realization. If you do not keep them, your meditation practice definitely will degenerate.

There are many samaya commitments but the one that I want to focus on here is the commitment to privacy. This includes a commitment not to use the teachings for personal gain, fame, and so on.

When you enter the Vajra Vehicle you commit yourself not to speak of any of these things with others who have not entered the Vajra Vehicle or who have not received the teachings involved. You can certainly talk about these things with your guru and the other followers, your dharma friends who

are following the same guru. You are not allowed to talk to anybody else about these things, at all.

If you do talk about these things here and there and all over the place, when you should not, then you are transgressing the samaya commitments that you have made and that does have serious consequences.

When you start the practice of dharma, it usually brings a great increase in blessings and all sorts of experiences arise. There are the three experiences of bliss, clarity, and emptiness mentioned before, and others. We are pleased when these things happen to us. Because we like them, there is the possibility or the tendency perhaps, that we would want to use those things in a normal kind of a way, in a worldly way, to make ourselves more important, to make ourselves more famous, to improve our position, and so forth.

There are many people these days who think, "Well, I really know a lot about this and I do have some experience of it. Actually, I have removed all of my ignorance, so I am going to talk about this and become famous." Perhaps they think about accumulating money as well; that certainly happens. These people are likely to say that they are really special people. Not only that but sometimes they portray themselves as very accomplished people. This is especially common in California, in the United States. There are gurus everywhere, even though many of them are charlatans, and they are all proclaiming themselves. A person who really has attainment keeps his or her attainments hidden. Why? It is a sign of the fact that they have become realized; they have lost their pride.

Some people have another way of doing it. They do not speak of their good qualities directly but find an indirect way to let you know that they are very special. Perhaps they rely on stories or some less direct way of talking. Maybe they

proclaim something then add a question to it. Maybe they say, “This happened to me and there was no discursive thought there, so that implies this, doesn’t it?” Or, “Does this mean this?” In a very clever way, they are showing that they think that they have some sort of great realization. It is fine to talk about these things with your guru and your friends on the path. Other than that, you should be extremely careful.

There are quite a few great teachers who really do see reality. There are many for example who really do see directly all of the six classes of migrators in their own abodes. Previously there were a lot of people like that in Tibet, and these days, too, there are still quite a few of them. For example, Karmapa, the Dalai Lama, and so forth. However, does the Dalai Lama ever say, “I see all of these things?” Does he ever say that? No. Does he ever say, “I have eliminated all of the causes of birth and death?” No. These are signs of the fact that internally he is a holy being. And we naturally do see him as a holy being. Why? It is a sign of his good qualities.

Another example of someone who actually does have qualities comes in the personage of the current Karmapa. The previous Karmapa had his close disciples. He said a number of things to some of them, which were very special instructions or statements given only to them. Nobody else knew about it, and the disciples were told to be quiet about it. The current Karmapa, on meeting with those disciples that were still alive, was able to tell them what the previous Karmapa had said. He knew exactly. That would be impossible unless he had very special qualities of mind.

There are a lot of other people who remember previous existences. And, there was the Tibetan lama who was actually able to go down to the hell realms, observe how things were there, and come back and tell people about it.

The Buddha understood the whole of reality as it is. These days, scientists would like to get to the bottom of things, but no matter what they do, they never really get to the bottom of it. Why? They rely on machinery and instrumentation of one sort or another to make their experiments. However, there just is not any machinery, equipment, instrumentation which can get to the bottom of the reality which The Buddha himself understood with his own mind.

Our business, as sentient beings who are seeking spiritual emancipation, is to come to reality. It is just that and nothing else. To do this, we need to keep our commitments and do the practice.

The possibility of coming to a full realization of the Four Truths of the Noble Ones, and the spiritual realization that that implies, is something which has come from The Buddha's time all the way down to the present. It still exists now and it is possible, even in the present time, to come to realization of that yourself. In the particular case of the path of Great Completion, it is possible to go all the way down the path to the very end where you obtain what is called "the rainbow body". When you obtain that kind of realization, you would obtain your final emancipation without losing your body. Even in these modern times in Tibet, for example, just before the Chinese arrived in Tibet, there was one lama called Lama Dundruk. He had three disciples, all of whom attained the rainbow body. So we are only talking about fifty years ago now. Additionally, after the Chinese had arrived and started their warfare with Tibet, there was a practice place called Dzogchen Kangra. At Dzogchen Kangra there were four people who achieved a very high realization in Great Completion. We know about that particular case because there were several people practising together in their practice room; four

of them dissolved their bodies into rainbow light and left behind just a heap of clothes, while the others were sitting there doing their practice, and the others reported that story to us.

You might be thinking, “When this kind of thing happens, what is the reason just the fingernails and the hair get left behind?” The reason given is because they are dead parts of the body that are not associated with mind. The fact that the fingernails and the hair are left behind in that way is a sign of their realization.

All in all, you should not be talking about private matters until you have the level of realization that allows you to do that correctly, appropriately, without corrupting your own commitments, and without harming others by teaching them things they are not ready for. What you should be doing is using the opportunity that still exists for you to become enlightened, especially with these profound instructions of Great Completion that let you obtain enlightenment in this very life.

THE CONDUCT

The actual practice of Great Completion can be summed up into view, meditation, and conduct. The view is the view of empty, self-knowing rigpa. The meditation is to stay in it, not making any alteration of the state. Then for conduct, Padmasambhava said,

“Even though your view is vast as space,
Conduct should be as fine as powder.”

The view in this case is that you are completely separated from all mental elaborations. Because you have such a high view, it is very easy to develop the idea that it is all right to do any kind of action at all, regardless of what it is, such as lying, stealing, and so forth and so on. However, as Padmasambhava said, that is a mistake; you must be very precise about how you conduct yourself within this view. What is the proper conduct with this view? It is to realize that even within that high view, karma has to be taken into account in every action even down to the minutest detail. Therefore you conduct yourself in such a way that you accumulate virtue as much as possible and eliminate degrading action as much as possible, paying attention to that in a very detailed way.

We speak of uniting view and conduct. The view is, as I explained previously, emptiness free from the four extremes. The conduct is what I have just explained, of accumulating merit and abandoning non-virtue. You put the two together in a unified way.

Conduct refers to the time when you are not doing formal meditation, when you doing your activities. When go about your various activities, all sorts of various unsatisfactory circumstances will arise. That is the first Truth of the Noble Ones. Those unsatisfactory circumstances will usually result in reactions of passion, aggression, ignorance, pride, jealousy, and so on, which themselves are unsatisfactory states of mind. That is the second Truth of the Noble Ones. I note that people get really upset over small things. There is no need for that. If you are doing something that does not really help very much, which does not have much advantage to yourself or anybody else, it is just not worth getting all hot and bothered over it.

One thing about the unsatisfactoriness of cyclic existence is that it starts with very small points. All of the discord that happens in cyclic existence starts with very small things. Therefore, you need to pay attention to the small things and be careful about that. For example, somebody, just by looking up, could see something that causes anger in their mind. If someone else looks at the person in a funny way, the person thinks, "Huh, what's that about?" Because of that he gets a bit upset, "I don't like that so much." Then he gets angry. That having happened, he decides that he doesn't like the other person very much. Then the other person thinks, "What's going on here? What's he doing? This is weird." It goes backwards and forwards, and increases further and further, and in the end they have a fight together. You have

one very tiny thing that does not matter at all which grows into a bigger and bigger problem until finally it is a really big problem.

So, you should be careful about even small things. Some people are very clever with their mouths. You have to be particularly careful about them. If you are not careful about what you say, that person who is inclined towards nastiness coming out of their mouth is going to be the source of a lot of trouble for you. It really depends on the person's intention. There are some people who have a lot to say but are basically very good people, so a problem does not come from their speech, but others can be quite the reverse.

It does happen that really large sufferings come about for us. It happens that husbands and wives separate. It happens that they get divorced with all of the attendant suffering that goes with it. On top of that, perhaps they get sick while they are in the middle of the divorce. It can get really miserable and unpleasant. Now those kinds of things are really the best opportunity for practice. So please, when those kinds of circumstances come along, do not wilt, do not hang your head down, do not let dribble come out of your mouth, do not just fall into total depression. What you have to do at that time is look at your mind. This mind that is really having a hard time, where is it? You cannot see it anywhere. Then stay in just in that very non-seeing.

Rigpa meditation will definitely help with these things, no matter how much they arise. You might have a very nice time going to the local monastery, wherever that is, and eating nice food there, resting gently there, having nice meditation, just generally having a very good time with your practice. You might spend a whole month doing that. On the other hand, you might spend just five minutes in the midst of deep difficul-

ties, such as the ones mentioned above, with your rigpa practice, and that five minutes would be much more valuable than, would accomplish a lot more than, the whole month you spent at the nice monastery.

This is the meditator's meditation and you need to put it together with all of these bad circumstances, whatever they might be, with any kind of unpleasantness that comes up. Whatever difficulty arises is the very point to which this meditation is to be connected.

We talked about unpleasant circumstances and situations that might arise. On the other hand, sometimes you have a good time. Perhaps you go out and dance the night away, and just generally make sure you have a good time. In that case you need to come down a little. The way to come down is to relax the mind and just look into the nature of that mind.

A yogin is a person who can apply his practice to both pleasant and unpleasant situations and, because he does that, he becomes completely stable within himself. He has his own ability to stay in his own place without being moved around by external circumstances. That is quite unlike us who are constantly being drawn away. We do not have that kind of ability to stay put. We are constantly being dragged about by good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant circumstances. For us, there can be a very pleasant circumstance and mind can be very happy but somewhere along the line that goes wrong and turns into unhappiness.

It is also true that the higher you are, the harder you fall. The happier you are, the harder you are going to fall when you do not know how to deal with it when you do fall. However, for the yogin who has separated himself from things with outflows—the deluded states of happiness and unhappiness—that does not happen. Holistic happiness is when you have

separated yourself away, in that way, from ordinary happiness and unhappiness.

Rigpa does have its own kind of happiness, though it is more like ease. The happiness that occurs in rigpa does not change. It is not alterable. It is not like the ordinary happiness that we have which goes up and down. That is because it is a kind of happiness that does not have any clinging associated with it.

Rigpa is just completely free from all kinds of unsatisfactoriness. The yogin who really has connected properly with the emptiness of his mind that is associated with rigpa practice is always happy. For example, Milarepa was somebody who really freed himself from all types of unsatisfactoriness and was always at ease with himself.

This yogin free from hope and fear is a person who is always in the state of meditation and always is at ease because of it. He is like that wherever he goes. Wherever he goes, he is always in a happy state. Milarepa said,

“A yogin like that is somebody who is happy wherever he goes. Wherever he goes, he feels as though it is his homeland.”

A yogin like that is like a king; he is on top of everything and everything is just fine for him. His mind is always filled with happiness. Whatever he does is fine. He is never poverty-stricken; he never has a feeling of, “I am missing something.” He always feels wealthy. That is how Milarepa kept himself in his retreats; he stayed within the confines of everything being all right.

We should, as much as we can, use our meditation to make the antidotes to affliction. For example, should anger arise, what should you do? Look right into the essence of the anger.

Look at the mind that is producing the anger and examine it. Does the very mind that is producing that anger have a colour to it, does it have a shape to it? Does this anger itself have birth, does it have dwelling, does it have cessation? No. The very source from which that anger arose does not exist. The producer of that anger, likewise, does not exist. If there is no source of the anger itself, there is no producer of the anger, then there is nothing to be angry at and then how can anger be produced? Thus, anger pacifies itself. Then again, a little bit of anger comes up. So you look again. Again it falls apart. Then again, you think something like, "It's not all right", and there is more anger. You look again and this time there is some sort of struggle going on. If you continue on like that and work with the anger a little bit rather than just letting the anger gain the upper hand, then, in the end, the intensity of the anger will start to subside. If you continue on with your practice of examining the source from which the anger would arise, the very essence of it, eventually you do come to the essence of the anger, emptiness.

If there is emptiness, there cannot be anger in that. However, the actual pure force of the anger does not necessarily have to fall away. It is possible for the mind to have energy at the same time as knowing itself that it is empty. For example, a great bodhisatva can have energy like anger coming off his mind but not be the energy of ordinary anger that comes out of our minds. Why? Because in his case, there is no grasping.

If we summarize what conduct is, it is as simple as "accumulate virtue, abandon degrading action".

DEDICATION

It is also an extremely important to do a dedication at the end of any practice of meditation or dharmic activity. Whatever meditation you do, whatever activity that you do that results in the accumulation of merit, should definitely be followed with a dedication.

When we say dedication, what do we mean? Dedication is the practice of giving away whatever it is that one has accumulated by one's practice. It can be dedicated to a higher purpose or to someone whom you wish to help. In our case, since the intention for whatever we did was to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, the dedication should be done for, or for the benefit of, all sentient beings.

It is important to do the dedication within the state of rigpa, if possible. Just as I explained previously about how the state of rigpa could include all the different aspects of meditation, including being devoted, and so forth and so on, your dedications can, and should be if possible, included within the state of rigpa. This is difficult to do at the beginning, therefore it is important to add a step to your dedication that will connect your dedications to this possibility. You add the dedication,

following the actual dedications, that you too dedicate as the great beings, the ones who could dedicate within rigpa, did their dedications. For example, you can say,

“Just as much as such-and-such great beings made their dedications, likewise, I, too, make my dedication.”

At the end of the dedication, you should feel that you have actually given away whatever it was—the merit from meditating for instance—that you were dedicating. When you do this, it is necessary to have the feeling that the sentient beings or whomever, actually did get whatever it was you were giving. You do not want the kind of wavering mind in which you are not really sure whether they got it or not. You want to arouse certainty for yourself that they got it. If you do it that way, I think it will work out.

RETREAT

The practice of meditation proceeds by hearing, principally, the oral instructions from the teacher in person then practising the dharma accordingly. This process of listening followed by practice has to be effective, that is, has to lead to realization of the meaning. To assist with that, we have retreat. Retreat can be a time of staying with the teacher, listening to the teachings, and practising them. More often though, it is a time of going off to do nothing else except practise the teachings that have been heard. In either case, the whole point of a retreat is to cultivate the meaning that you have understood so that the dharma which was heard actually becomes part of your mind stream.

1. Three Solitudes

To do a retreat, generally speaking, it is necessary to have solitude of body, speech, and mind. Since you have not realized the definitive dharma, it is normal for you to become distracted from reality and to have all of the difficulties and problems of worldly existence arise. Retreat allows you to isolate yourself from the distraction-induced difficulties of

worldly existence so that you can have a good experience of dharma.

The solitude of body, speech, and mind needed for a retreat is called the three isolations. Isolation of body means to remove yourself from the normal physical comings and goings of worldly life and hence reduce the difficulties that arise because of it. Isolation of speech means to remove yourself from the various worldly expressions of speech—gossiping, singing meaningless songs, complaining about others, quarrelling, and so on—which result in all sorts of disturbances and disputes. By keeping silence, you isolate your speech from all those faults. Isolation of mind tends to follow on automatically from isolation of body and speech because the actions of body and speech are the source of most worries, still, while you are staying in retreat, you should make certain that you have complete isolation of mind by abandoning unnecessary thoughts of your normal life and leaving your mind relaxed. Thus, while you are in retreat, there is no need to think of others who might harm you, no need to think of problems with your parents and relatives, and so on.

So, you start by relaxing the body and cutting speech because this alleviates the poor state of the channels and winds. By relaxing the body and cutting speech, the channels are straightened and the winds lose their roughness with the result that mind becomes relaxed and straight, as is said.

2. A Good Motivation

Following that, there is the motivation for doing the retreat. Do not motivate yourself out of desire to be more important or well known nor out of ordinary worldly thoughts of doing the retreat to overcome enemies and develop friends. Rather, with a mind at ease, develop a good motivation for

doing the retreat. For example, you can think to yourself, “For so many days, I will stay here in retreat. Here in retreat, I will put aside the normal problems of worldly life by taking up the three isolations. During that time I will think carefully about whatever the teacher explained”.

3. The Value of Retreat

When you involve yourself in worldly ways of doing things, you become distracted from reality and that is the source of all unsatisfactoriness. There are three ways of becoming distracted into worldly conduct—through body, speech, and mind. For example, in the case of the body, you might kill, take what has not been offered, or take a sexual partner inappropriately and the passion, aggression, and-or ignorance involved in the activity will cause trouble for yourself and discord with others. In the case of speech, you might lie, saying that something is when it is not, speak harshly, saying all sorts of unpleasant things, slander others, or gossip meaninglessly, and this becomes the source of many of the problems in your world. Those things have the nature of dragging down both yourself and others, creating non-virtue where there was virtue, turning ease into discomfort, and creating sadness where there was happiness.

All of that is distraction leading to unsatisfactoriness and the root of all of it is mind. Therefore, mind is the principal point. What this means is that, if you want a happy situation for yourself in the world, it has to start with a good mind. Mind is very powerful, it has a lot of capability. A person could have everything—like a king or an extremely wealthy person—but if his mind is not satisfied, he will not enjoy himself. A person who is not satisfied will not be happy no matter what goods or wealth he has. On the other hand, a person who is

quite poor but who has a satisfied mind will be happy regardless of his external circumstances. Happiness and suffering depends entirely on mind and not at all on possessions and wealth or body and speech.

Generally speaking, the situation in our world today is that externally, material things are improving markedly but, since mind's internal circumstance does not go up on the basis of improving external circumstances, there is increasing fear, difficulty, and unsatisfactoriness in the world. If, in tandem with the external improvements, you were internally to increase the wealth of mind and improve the way you carry it, things would go better all together. To improve the general wealth of mind, some kind of method, such as the methods contained in the Buddhist teaching, is needed. If you go into retreat, practise that method, and the inner wealth of mind increases, then it will benefit your level of worldly happiness and will help to develop your inner nature of reality in this and all your future lives. If it turns out well, you will become fearless, you will be a warrior, and all kinds of wealth and goods will come to you automatically. Even if it does not turn out at such a high level, it will at least help to make this life meaningful.

ENLIGHTENMENT

Practice will eventually lead you to enlightenment. At that point, you will have cleaned off your impure body and attained a pure vajra body, cleared off your impure speech and attained the vajra speech of a buddha, and cleared off your impure mind and attained the final wisdom of a buddha. As a buddha, you have inestimable capability and activity. Really speaking, there is no way to calculate the extent of a buddha's activity; it is just like space, which has no beginning or end to it. With that activity, you will have the capability to benefit each sentient being in accord with the way he or she needs to be benefited.

The ways in which a buddha benefits sentient beings is summed up in the Vajra Vehicle teachings in the four styles of activity. They are called: pacifying, enriching, magnetizing, and destroying. Pacifying means to exert a calming influence in order to alleviate some problem, for example to cure illness or to remove negative influences. Enriching means to exert an increasing type of influence, for example to increase wealth, realization, and so on. Magnetizing means to exert power over other things and beings and to draw them under one's own

power, for example, to magnetize others or wealth. Destroying means to eliminate an undesirable situation by force.

GLOSSARY

Actuality, Tib. gnas lugs: A key term in both sutra and tantra and one of a pair of terms, the other being apparent reality (Tib. snang lugs). The two terms are used when determining the reality of a situation. The actuality of any given situation is how (lugs) the situation actuality sits or is present (gnas); the apparent reality is how any given situation appears to an observer. Something could appear in many different ways, depending on the circumstances at the time and on the being perceiving it but, regardless of those circumstances, it will always have its own actuality, how it really is. The term actuality is frequently used in Mahāmudrā and Great Completion teachings to mean the fundamental reality of any given phenomenon or situation before any deluded mind alters it and makes it appear differently.

Affliction, Skt. kleśha, Tib. nyon mongs: This term is usually translated as emotion or disturbing emotion, etcetera but Buddha was very specific about the meaning of this word. When the Buddha referred to the emotions, meaning a movement of mind, he did not refer to them as such but called them “kleśha” in Sanskrit, meaning exactly “affliction”. It is a basic part of the Buddhist teaching that emotions afflict beings, giving them problems at the time and causing more problems in the future.

Alertness, Tib. shes bzhin: Alertness is a specific mental event that occurs in dualistic mind. It and another mental event, mindfulness, are the two functions of mind that must be developed in order to develop shamatha or one-pointedness of mind. In that context, mindfulness is what remembers the object of the concentration and holds the mind to it while alertness is the mind watching the situation to ensure that the mindfulness is not lost. If distraction does occur, alertness will know it and will inform the mind to re-establish mindfulness again.

Alteration, altered, same as contrivance q.v.

Assurance, Tib. gdeng: Although often translated as confidence, this term means assurance with all of the extra meaning conveyed by that term. A bird might be confident of its ability to fly but more than that, it has the assurance that it will not fall to the ground because of knowing that it has wings and the training to use them. Similarly, a person might be confident that they could liberate the afflictions but not assured of doing so because of lack of training or other causes. However, a person who has accumulated the causes to be able to liberate afflictions trained is assured of the ability to do so.

Bliss, clarity, and no-thought, Tib. bde gsal mi rtog pa: A practitioner who engages in practice will have signs of that practice appear as various types of temporary experience. Most commonly, three types of experience are met with: bliss, clarity, and no-thought. Bliss is ease of the body and-or mind, clarity is heightened knowing of mind, and no-thought is an absence of thought that happens in the mind. The three are usually mentioned when discussing the passing experiences that arise because of practising meditation but there is also a way of describing them as final experiences of realization.

Clarity or Illumination, Skt. *vara*, Tib. *gsal ba*: When you see this term, it should be understood as an abbreviation of the full term in Tibetan, *'od gsal ba*, which is usually translated as luminosity. It is not another factor of mind distinct from luminosity but merely a convenient abbreviation in both Indian and Tibetan dharma language for the longer term, luminosity. See “Luminosity” in this glossary for more.

Clinging, Tib. *zhen pa*: In Buddhism, this term refers specifically to the twofold process of dualistic mind mis-taking things that are not true, not pure, as true, pure, etcetera and then, because of seeing them as highly desirable even though they are not, attaching itself to or clinging to those things. This type of clinging acts as a kind of glue that keeps you with the unsatisfactory things of cyclic existence because of mistakenly seeing them as desirable.

Confusion, Tib. *'khrul pa*: In Buddhism, this term mostly refers to the fundamental confusion of taking things the wrong way that happens because of fundamental ignorance though it can also have the more general meaning of having lots of thoughts and being confused about it. In the first case, it is defined like this, “Confusion is the appearance to rational mind of something being present when it is not”, and refers for example to seeing an object, such as a table, as being truly present when in fact it is present only as mere, interdependent appearance.

Contrivance, contrived, Tib. *bcos pa*: A term meaning that something has been altered from its native state.

Cyclic existence, Skt. *saṃsāra*, Tib. *'khor ba*: The type of existence that sentient beings have which is that they continue on from one existence to another, always within the enclosure of births that are produced by ignorance and experienced as unsatisfactory. Although the Tibetan term literally means

“cycling”, the original Sanskrit has a slightly different meaning; it means to go about, here and there.

Dharmakaya, Tib. chos sku: The mind of a buddha. Dharma here means reality, what actually is, and kāya means body.

Dharmata, Tib. chos nyid: A Sanskrit term used to refer to the reality of any given situation. Thus, there are many dharmatās. The term is often used in Buddhism to refer to general reality that underlies all types of existence but that is not its only meaning. For example, even the fact of water’s wetness can be referred to as the dharmatā of water, meaning water’s reality in general. The term is similar to “actuality” (Tib. gnas lugs).

Direct Crossing, Tib. tho rgal: The name of the two main practices of the innermost level of Great Completion. The other one is Thorough Cut.

Discursive thought, Skt. vikalpita, Tib. rnam rtog: This means more than just the superficial thought that is heard as a voice in the head. It includes the entirety of conceptual process that arises due to mind contacting any object of any of the senses. The Sanskrit and Tibetan literally mean “(dualistic) thought (that arises from the mind wandering among the various (superficies perceived in the doors of the senses)”.

Elaboration, Tib. spro ba: to be producing thoughts.

Enlightenment mind, Skt. bodhicitta, Tib. byang chub sems: A key term of the Great Vehicle. It is the type of mind that is connected not with the lesser enlightenment of an arhat but the enlightenment of a truly complete buddha. As such, it is a mind that is connected with the aim of bringing all sentient beings to that same level of buddhahood. A person who has this mind has entered the Great Vehicle and is either a bodhisatva or a buddha.

It is important to understand that the term is used to refer equally to the minds of all levels of bodhisatva on the path to buddhahood and to the mind of a buddha who has completed the path. Therefore it is not “mind striving for enlightenment” as is so often translated but “enlightenment mind”, that kind of mind which is connected with the full enlightenment of a truly complete buddha and which is present in all those who belong to the Great Vehicle. The term is used in the conventional Great Vehicle and also in the Vajra Vehicle. In the Vajra Vehicle, there are some special uses of the term where substances of the pure aspect of the subtle physical body are understood to be manifestations of enlightenment mind.

Entity, Tib. ngo bo: The entity of something is just exactly what that thing is. In English we would often simply say “thing” rather than entity but there is the problem that, in Buddhism, “thing” has a very specific meaning and not the general meaning that it has in English. See also under Essence in this glossary.

Essence, Tib. ngo bo: This is a key term used throughout Buddhist theory. The original in Sanskrit and the term in Tibetan, too, has both meanings of “essence” and “entity”. In some situations the term has more the first meaning and in others, the second. For example, when speaking of mind and mind’s essence, it is referring to the core or essential part within mind. On the other hand, when speaking of something such as fire, one can speak of the entity, fire, and its characteristics, such as heat, and so on; in this case, the term does not mean essence but means that thing, what is actually is.

Fictional, Skt. saṃvṛti, Tib. kun rdzob: This term is paired with the term “superfactual” q.v. Until now these two terms have been translated as “relative” and “absolute” but the translations are nothing like the original terms. These terms are extremely important in the Buddhist teaching so it is very

important that they be corrected but more than that, if the actual meaning of these terms is not presented, then the teaching connected with them cannot be understood.

The Sanskrit term *saṃvṛti* means a deliberate invention, a fiction, a hoax. It refers to the mind of ignorance which, because of being obscured and so not seeing suchness, is not true but a fiction. The things that appear to the ignorance are therefore fictional. Nonetheless, the beings who live in this ignorance believe that the things that appear to them through the filter of ignorance are true, are real. Therefore, these beings live in fictional truth.

Fictional truth, Skt. *saṃvṛtisatya*, Tib. *kun rdzob bden pa*: See under “Fictional” for an explanation of this term.

Foremost instruction, Skt. *upadeśha*, Tib. *man ngag*: there are several types of instruction mentioned in Buddhist literature: there is the general level of instruction which is the meaning contained in the words of the texts of the tradition; on a more personal and direct level there is oral instruction which has been passed down from teacher to student from the time of the buddha; and on the most profound level there are foremost instructions which are not only oral instructions provided by one’s guru but are special, core instructions that come out of personal experience and which convey the teaching concisely and with the full weight of personal experience. Foremost instructions or *upadeśha* are crucial to the Vajra Vehicle because these are the special way of passing on the profound instructions needed for the student’s realization.

Fortunate person, Tib. *skal ldan*: A person who has accumulated the karma needed to be involved with any given practice of dharma. This term is especially used in relation to the Vajra Vehicle whose practices are generally very hard to meet with. To meet with them, a person has to have devel-

oped all of the karma needed for such a rare opportunity, and this kind of person is then called “a fortunate one” or “fortunate person”.

Great Completion, rdzogs pa chen po: Two main practices of reality developed in the Buddhist traditions of ancient India and then came to Tibet: Great Completion (Mahāsaṅdhi) and Great Seal (Mahāmudrā). Great Completion and Great Seal are names for reality and names for a practice that directly leads to that reality. Their ways of describing reality and their practices are very similar. The Great Completion teachings are the pinnacle teachings of the tantric teachings of Buddhism that first came into Tibet with Padmasambhava and his peers and were later kept alive in the Nyingma (Earlier Ones) tradition. The Great Seal practice came into Tibet later and was held in the Sakya and Kagyu lineages. Later again, the Great Seal became held by the Gelugpa lineage, which obtained its transmissions of the instructions from the Sakya and Kagyu lineages.

These days it is popular to call Great Completion by the name Great Perfection. However, that is a mistake. The original name Mahāsaṅdhi means that one space of reality in which all things come together. Thus it means “completeness” or “completion” as the Tibetans chose to translate it and does not imply or contain the sense of “perfection”.

Great Vehicle, Skt. mahāyāna, Tib. theg pa chen po: The Buddha’s teachings as a whole can be summed up into three vehicles where a vehicle is defined as that which can carry you to a certain destination. The first vehicle, called the Lesser Vehicle, contains the teachings designed to get an individual moving on the spiritual path through showing the unsatisfactory state of cyclic existence and an emancipation from that. However, that path is only concerned with personal emancipation and fails to take account of all of the beings that there are in existence. There used to be eighteen schools of Lesser

Vehicle in India but the only one surviving these days is the Theravada of south-east Asia. The Greater Vehicle is a step up from that. The Buddha explained that it was great in comparison to the Lesser Vehicle for seven reasons. The first of those is that it is concerned with attaining the truly complete enlightenment of a truly complete buddha for the sake of every sentient being where the Lesser Vehicle is concerned only with a personal liberation that is not truly complete enlightenment and which is achieved only for the sake of that practitioner. The Great Vehicle has two divisions. There is a conventional Great Vehicle in which the path is taught in a logical, conventional way. There is also an unconventional Great Vehicle in which the path is taught in an unconventional and very direct way. This latter vehicle is called the Vajra Vehicle because it takes the innermost, indestructible (vajra) fact of reality of one's own mind as the vehicle to enlightenment.

Ground, Tib. gzhi: This is the first member of the formulation of ground, path, and fruition. Ground, path, and fruition is the way that the teachings of the path of oral instruction belonging to the Vajra Vehicle are presented to students. Ground refers to the basic situation as it is.

Intent, Tib. dgongs pa: The honorific term for the way that something is understood or for a mind that has a certain understanding.

Introduction and To Introduce, Tib. ngos sprad and ngos sprod pa respectively: This pair of terms is usually translated in the U.S.A. these days as “pointing out” “and “to point out” but this is a mistake that has, unfortunately, become entrenched. The terms are the standard terms used in day to day life for the situation in which one person introduces another person to someone or something. They are the exact same words as our English “introduction” and “to introduce”.

In the Vajra Vehicle, these terms are specifically used for the situation in which one person introduces another person to the nature of his own mind. Now there is a term in Tibetan for “pointing out” but that term is never used for this purpose because in this case no-one points out anything. Rather, a person is introduced by another person to a part of himself that he has forgotten about.

Kagyū, Tib. bka’ brgyud: There are four main schools of Buddhism in Tibet—Nyingma, Kagyū, Sakya, and Gelug. Nyingma is the oldest school dating from about 800 A.D. Kagyū and Sakya both appeared in the 12th century A.D. Each of these three schools came directly from India. The Gelug school came later and did not come directly from India but came from the other three. The Nyingma school holds the tantric teachings called Great Completion (Dzogchen); the other three schools hold the tantric teachings called Mahāmudrā. Kagyū practitioners often join Nyingma practice with their Kagyū practice and Kagyū teachers often teach both, so it is common to hear about Kagyū and Nyingma together.

Key points, Tib. gnad: Key points are those places in one’s being that one works, like pressing buttons, in order to get some desired effect. For example, in meditation, there are key points of the body; by adjusting those key points, the mind is brought closer to reality and the meditation is thus assisted.

In general, this term is used in Buddhist meditation instruction but it is, in particular, part of the special vocabulary of the Great Completion teachings. Overall, the Great Completion teachings are given as a series of key points that must be attended to in order to bring forth the various realizations of the path.

Lesser Vehicle, Skt. hīnayāna, Tib. theg pa dman pa: See under Great Vehicle.

Liveliness, Tib. rtsal: A key term in both Mahāmudrā and Great Completion. The term means the ability that something has to express itself. In the case of rigpa, it refers to how the rigpa actually comes out into expression. The term is sometimes translated as “display” but that is not right. It is not merely the display that is being talked about here but the fact that something has the ability to express itself in a certain way. Another English word that fits the meaning, though one which is drier than “liveliness” is “expressivity”. In the end, given the way that this term is actually used in the higher tantras, it refers to the liveliness of whatever is being referred to, usually rigpa.

Luminosity, Skt. prabhāsvara, Tib. ’od gsal ba: the core of mind, called mind’s essence, has two aspects, parts, or factors as they are called. One is emptiness and the other is knowing. Luminosity is a metaphor for the fundamental knowing quality of the essence of mind. It is sometimes translated as “clear light” but that is a mistake that comes from not understanding how the words of the Sanskrit and the Tibetan, too, go together. It does not refer to a light that has the quality of clearness (something that makes no sense, actually!) but refers to the illuminative property which is the hallmark of mind. Mind knows, that is what it does. Metaphorically, it is a luminosity that illuminates its own content. In both Sanskrit and Tibetan Buddhist literature, the term is frequently abbreviated just to gsal ba, “clarity”, with the same meaning.

Mind, Skt. chitta, Tib. sems: the complicated process of mind which occurs because there is ignorance. This sort of mind is a samsaric phenomenon. It is a dualistic mind.

Mindfulness, Tib. dran pa: A particular mental event, one that has the ability to keep mind on its object. Together with alertness, it is one of the two causes of developing shamatha. See alertness for a explanation.

Not stopped luminosity or clarity, Tib. ma 'gags pa: An important path term in the teaching of both Mahāmudrā and Great Completion. The essence of mind has two parts: emptiness and luminosity. Both of these must come unified. However, when a practitioner does the practice, he will fall into one extreme or the other and that is called “stoppage”. The aim of the practice is to get to the stage in which there is both emptiness and luminosity together. In that case, there is no stoppage of falling into one extreme or the other. Thus non-stopped luminosity is a term that indicates that there is the luminosity with all of its appearance yet that luminosity, for the practitioner, is not mistaken, is not stopped off. Stopped luminosity is an experience like luminosity but in which the appearances have, at least to some extent, not been mixed with emptiness.

Post-attainment, Tib. rjes thob: See “Equipoise and post-attainment”.

Prajna, Tib. shes rab: A Sanskrit term for the type of mind that makes good and precise distinctions between this and that and hence which arrives at good understanding. It is sometimes translated as “wisdom” but that is not correct because it is, generally speaking, a mental event belonging to dualistic mind where “wisdom” is generally used to refer to the non-dualistic knower of a Buddha. Moreover, the main feature of prajna is its ability to distinguish correctly between one thing and another and hence to have a good understanding. It is very much part of intellect.

Preserve, Tib. skyong ba: An important term in both Mahāmudrā and Great Completion. In general, it means to defend,

protect, nurture, maintain. In the higher tantras it means to keep something just as it is, to nurture that something so that it stays and is not lost. Also, in the higher tantras, it is often used in reference to preserving the state where the state is some particular state of being. Because of this, the phrase “preserve the state” is an important instruction in the higher tantras.

Rational mind, Tib. blo: The Kagyu and Nyingma traditions use this term pejoratively for the most part. In the Great Completion and Mahāmudrā teachings, this term specifically means the dualistic mind. It is the villain, so to speak, which needs to be removed from the equation in order to obtain enlightenment. This term is commonly translated simply as mind but that causes confusion with the many other words that are also translated simply as mind. It is not just another mind but is specifically the sort of mind that creates the situation of this and that (ratio in Latin) and hence upholds the duality of samsara. It is the very opposite of the essence of mind. Thus, this is a key term which should be noted and not just glossed over as “mind”.

Resting in its own character: rang babs bzhag: an very important term in Mahāmudrā and Great Completion which refers to the basic style of meditation in these systems. To self-rest means that the resting is not made up, forced or produced but allowed to happen of itself.

Rigpa, Tib. rig pa: This is the singularly most important term in the whole of Great Completion and Mahāmudrā. In particular, it is the key word of all words in the Great Completion system of the Thorough Cut. Rigpa literally means to know in the sense of “I see!” It is used at all levels of meaning from the coarsest everyday sense of knowing something to the deepest sense of knowing something as presented in the system of Thorough Cut. The system of Thorough Cut uses this term in a very special sense, though it still retains

its basic meaning of “to know”. To translate it as “awareness” which is common practice these days is a poor practice; there are many kinds of awareness but there is only one rigpa and besides, rigpa is substantially more than just awareness. Since this is such an important term and since it lacks an equivalent in English, I choose not to translate it. However, it will be helpful in reading the text to understanding the meaning as just given.

This is the term used to indicate enlightened mind as experienced by the practitioner on the path of these practices. The term itself specifically refers to the dynamic knowing quality of mind. It absolutely does not mean a simple registering, as implied by the word “awareness” which unfortunately is often used to translate this term. There is no word in English that exactly matches it, though the idea of “seeing” or “insight on the spot” is very close. Proof of this is found in the fact that the original Sanskrit term “vidyā” is actually the root of all words in English that start with “vid” and mean “to see”, for example, “video”, “vision”, and so on. Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, who was particular skilled at getting Tibetan words into English, also stated that this term rigpa really did not have a good equivalent in English, though he thought that “insight” was the closest. My own conclusion after hearing extensive teaching on it is that rigpa is just best left untranslated. However, it will be helpful in reading the text to understanding the meaning as just given. Note that rigpa has both noun and verb forms. To get the verb form, I use “rigpa’ing”.

Secret Mantra, Tib. gsang sngags: Another name for the Vajra Vehicle or the tantric teachings.

Seven Dharmas of Vairochana, Tib. rnam par snang mdzad chos bdun: These are the seven aspects of Vairochana’s posture, the posture used for formal meditation practice. The posture for the legs is the one called “vajra posture” or vajrāsana.

In it, the legs are crossed one on top of the other, right on top of left. The advantage of this posture is that, of the five basic winds of the subtle body, the downward-clearing wind is caused to enter the central channel. The posture for the hands is called the equipoise mudrā. The right palm is placed on top of the left palm and the two thumbs are just touching, raised up over the palms. The advantage of this posture is that the Fire-Accompanying Wind is caused to enter the central channel. The posture for the spine is that the spine should be held straight. The advantage of this posture is that the Pervader Wind is caused to enter the central channel. The posture for the shoulders is one in which the shoulders are held up slightly in a particular way. The advantage of this posture is that Upward-Moving Wind is caused to enter the central channel. The neck and chin are held in a particular posture: the neck is drawn up a little and the chin slightly hooked in towards the throat. The advantage of this posture is that the Life-Holder Wind is caused to enter the central channel. The tip of the tongue is joined with the forward part of the palate and the jaws are relaxed, with the teeth and lips allowed to sit normally. The eyes are directed down past the tip of the nose, into space. Placing the gaze in this way keeps the clarity of mind and prevents sinking, agitation, and so on.

Shamatha, Tib. gzhi gnas: The name of one of the two main practices of meditation used in the Buddhist system to gain insight into reality. This practice creates a foundation of one-pointedness of mind which can then be used to focus the insight of the other practice, vipaśhyanā. If the development of shamatha is taken through to completion, the result is a mind that sits stably on its object without any effort and a body which is filled with ease. Altogether, this result of the practice is called “the creation of workability of body and mind”.

State, Tib. ngang: A key term in Mahāmudrā and Great Completion. Unfortunately it is often not translated and in so doing much meaning is lost. Alternatively, it is often translated as “within” which is incorrect. The term means a “state”. A state is a certain, ongoing situation. In Buddhist meditation in general, there are various states that a practitioner has to enter and remain in as part of developing the meditation.

Superfactual, Skt. paramārtha, Tib. don dam: This term is paired with the term “fictional” q.v. Until now these two terms have been translated as “relative” and “absolute” but those translations are nothing like the original terms. These terms are extremely important in the Buddhist teaching so it is very important that their translations be corrected but, more than that, if the actual meaning of these terms is not presented, the teaching connected with them cannot be understood.

The Sanskrit term paramārtha literally means “a superior or holy kind of fact” and refers to the wisdom mind possessed by those who have developed themselves spiritually to the point of having transcended samsara. That wisdom is *superior* to an ordinary, un-developed person’s consciousness and the *facts* that appear on its surface are superior compared to the facts that appear on the ordinary person’s consciousness. Therefore, it is superfact or the holy fact, more literally. What this wisdom sees is true for the beings who have it, therefore what the wisdom sees is superfactual truth.

Superfactual truth, Skt. paramārthasatya, Tib. don dam bden pa: See under “Superfactual” for an explanation of this term.

Superfice, superficialities, Tib. rnam pa: in discussions of mind, a distinction is made between the entity of mind which is a mere knower and the superficial things that appear on its

surface and which are known by it. In other words, the superficies are the various things which pass over the surface of mind but which are not mind. Superficies are all the specifics that constitute appearance, for example, the colour white within a moment of visual consciousness, the sound heard within an ear consciousness, and so on.

Temporary experience, Tib. nyams: The practice of meditation brings with it various experiences that happen simply because of the meditation. These experiences are temporary experiences and not the final, unchanging experience, of realization.

Thorough Cut, Tib. khregs chod: the Dzogchen system has several levels to it. The innermost level has two main practices, the first called Thregcho which literally translates as Thorough Cut and the second called Thogal which translates as Direct Crossing. The meaning of Thorough Cut has been misunderstood. The meaning is clearly explained in the *Illuminator Tibetan-English Dictionary*:

“Thorough Cut is a practice in which the solidification that sentient beings produce by having rational minds which grasp at a perceived object and perceiving subject is sliced through so as to get the underlying reality which has always been present in the essence of mind and which is called Alpha Purity in this system of teachings. For this reason, Thorough Cut is also known as Alpha Purity Thorough Cut.”

The etymology of the word is explained in the Great Completion teachings either as གྲེགས་སུ་ཚོད་པ་ or གྲེགས་གཞི་ཚོད་པ་. In either case, the term ཚོད་པ་ is “a cut”; there are all sorts of different “cuts” and this is one of them. Then, in the case of གྲེགས་སུ་ཚོད་པ་, གྲེགས་སུ་ is an adverb modifying the verb “to cut” and has the meaning of making the cut fully, completely. It is explained with the example of slicing off a

glossary entry “Great Vehicle:. It is called the Vehicle of Characteristics because the teachings in it rely on a conventional approach in which logic is used to find reality and in doing so, the characteristics of phenomena are a key part of the explanations of the system.

View, meditation, and conduct, Tib. Ita sgom spyod: A formulation of the teachings that contains all of the meaning of the path.

Vipashyana, Tib. lhag mthong: The Sanskrit name for one of the two main practices of meditation needed in the Buddhist system for gaining insight into reality. The other one, shamatha, keeps the mind focussed while this one, vipaśhyānā, looks piercingly into the nature of things.

Wisdom, Skt. jñāna, Tib. ye shes: This is a fruition term that refers to the kind of mind, the kind of knower possessed by a buddha. The original Sanskrit term has many meanings but overall has the sense of just knowing. In Buddhism, it refers to the most basic type of knowing possible. Sentient beings could do this but their minds are obscured so, although they have the potential for knowing with the wisdom of a buddha, it does not happen. If they practise the path to buddhahood, at some point they will leave behind their obscuration and start knowing in this very simple and immediate way.

This sort of knowing is there at the core of every being’s mind. Therefore, the Tibetans called it “the particular type of awareness which is always there”. Because of their wording, it is often called “primordial wisdom” but that is too much. It simply means wisdom in the sense of the most fundamental knowing possible.



Tony Duff has spent a lifetime pursuing the Buddha's teaching and transmitting it to others. In the early 1970's, during his post-graduate studies in molecular biology, he went to Asia and met the Buddhist teachings of various South-east Asian countries. He met Tibetan Buddhism in Nepal and has followed it since. After his trip he abandoned worldly life and was the first monk ordained in his home country of Australia. Together with several others, he founded the monastery called Chenrezig Institute for Wisdom Culture where he studied and practised the Gelugpa teachings for several years under the guidance of Lama Yeshe, Lama Zopa, Geshe Lodan, and Zasep Tulku. After that, he offered back his ordination and left for the USA to study the Kagyu teachings with the incomparable Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. Tony was very active in the community and went through all possible levels of training that were available during his twelve year stay. He was also a core member of the Nalanda Translation Committee. After Chogyam Trungpa died, Tony went to live in Nepal where he worked as the personal translator for Tsoknyi Rinpoche and also translated for several other well-known teachers. He also founded and directed the largest Tibetan text preservation project in Asia, the Drukpa Kagyu Heritage Project, which he oversaw for eight years. He also established the Padma Karpo Translation Committee which has produced many fine translations and made many resources for translators such as the highly acclaimed *Illuminator Tibetan-English Dictionary*. After the year 2000, Tony focussed primarily on obtaining Dzogchen teachings from the best teachers available, especially within Tibet, and translating and teaching them. He has received much approval from many teachers and has been given the titles "lotsawa" and "lama" and been strongly encouraged by them to teach Westerners. One way he does that is by producing these fine translations.

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